The Cheju-do Rebellion

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INTRODUCTION

Cheju-do is known today mostly for its booming tourism, its sandy beaches, its lush orange groves, and its people. Located some fifty miles below the southernmost tip of the Korean peninsula, and about twice as far from the nearest landfall in Japan, the 700-square-mile island is dominated by the extinct volcanic crater of Halla-san, at 6,000 feet the highest peak in South Korea. Cheju-do is now an easy hour's flight from Seoul. Visitors come and go, soaking up the local color and enjoying the spectacular scenery. Few of them know anything of its history, other than romantic guidebook tales of its founding in the union of three island men spawned from an underground spring and three women washed up from the sea.\(^1\) The story has a particular appeal to the many newlywed couples who have made the island the most popular honeymoon spot in South Korea. Yet discordant notes occasionally intrude: the ruins of wrecked temples on the slopes of the mountain, clusters of memorial tablets enclosed by stone walls, the foundations of an upland village now overgrown with brambles.\(^2\)

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1. Fredrick H. Dustin, *An Introduction to Cheju-do: Korea's Island Province* (n.p., 1975), is one such account. Published with a special grant from the Asia Foundation to Cheju National University, the book makes no mention at all of the rebellion. The introduction does note, though, that “as time goes on it may be revised and somewhat expanded,” perhaps in reference to this omission.

For beneath the island’s natural beauty and new-found prosperity lies a tragic and bloody past.

The most appalling chapter in its history occurred little more than thirty years ago. Led by Communist guerrilla bands rushing down from Halla mountain, the people of the island rose up on April 3, 1948, in opposition to elections scheduled for the southern zone. Before it was over, a year later, the rebellion had claimed tens of thousands of persons as its victims. Whole villages in the interior of the island were laid waste, their inhabitants cruelly massacred or forcibly relocated to refugee camps along the coast. Only fragmentary accounts of this slaughter ever reached the outside world. Few relief efforts were undertaken. And for years the island languished in poverty and obscurity, ignored by the Rhee government. It was only in the 1960s that it finally began to recover.

Despite its importance, the Cheju-do rebellion has been little studied. No more than a few paragraphs have been published on it in English, and no definitive treatment has yet been done in any language. Information on the rebellion is available mostly in scattered Korean accounts and in a large number of recently declassified American archival documents.

pp. 54-57, that seems to be reprinted from an account written at the time of the rebellion.


4. Since these written sources vary greatly in their reliability and coverage, it may be well to say a few words about them before beginning this account. There are three main sources: South Korean, Communist, and American.

The South Korean materials consist of both military histories and studies of the South Korean labor party (SKLP). While these sources provide a basic record of events, they also have many problems. The rebellion usually receives only a limited treatment, a chapter or two at most, and is generally not the main concern of these books. The military histories suffer from too narrow a focus on the personalities of successive ROK commanders and the tactics they adopted on the island. Details on the actual conduct of operations are usually lacking. Studies of the SKLP, on the other hand, often seem to be overly general in their analysis, a characteristic that probably stems from a natural reluctance to delve too deeply into areas that might restrict their distribution. The South Korean sources also exhibit a certain reticence and embarrassment about the often brutal way in which the rebellion was suppressed.

Unexpectedly, there are few Communist accounts. The main reason seems to be that the rebellion is inextricably related to the policies of Pak Hoon-yong, the chief rival of Kim II-sung in the factional in-fighting within the northern leadership during this period. The only full-length treatment of the rebellion is a privately printed book, published by Kim Pong-hyoun and Kim Min-ju, two Korean residents in Japan who appear to have originally come from Cheju-do (Kim Pong-hyoun, and Kim Min-ju, eds., Cheju-do imindil üi 4.3 mujang t'ujæng sa-Charyo-jp

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A TRADITION OF REBELLION

Cheju-do has a long history of weak government control and periodic rebellion. The island did not come under the direct control of the central government until the end of the Koryo dynasty, maintaining before this a loose tribute relationship with the mainland as the independent kingdom of Tamna. When Korea was attacked by the Mongols during the thirteenth century, the island served as a final refuge for rebel holdouts against the Yulan invaders. Subjugated by a combined Mongol and Koryo army, the island was turned into a pasturage land for raising horses under Mongol military administration. Sporadic resistance against the Yulan continued for a century, and later against the Koryo dynasty when it attempted to reassert control. Throughout most of the Yi dynasty, the island languished as an isolated backwater remote from the political life of the country. The only concern of the government appears to have been to prevent the emergence of separatist tendencies. Officials were customarily forbidden to bring their families to the island to avoid giving offense to prominent Cheju-do families by intruding too deeply into their affairs and, more importantly, to ensure that they did not sink down local roots that might enable them to appropriate to themselves the island’s ancient dynastic claims. Cheju-do was used as a place of political exile, its isolation ideally suitting it for that purpose. Its people, like those of other islands, were looked down on by mainlanders and largely ignored by the government.

[Materials on the history of the April 3 armed uprising of the Cheju-do people] [Osaka, 1963]. The book is based mainly on interviews with former residents of the island and participants in the rebellion who managed to escape to Japan. While apparently well researched, the book embellishes incidents with gory details, exaggerates the revolutionary zeal of the Cheju-do people, and uses inflammatory language. Nevertheless, when it has been possible to check against other sources, the book, stripped of these encumbrances, does seem reliable as a bare narrative of events. It has been used here, with considerable caution, in this sense and not for interpretation.

The third set of sources, American archival materials, include the Far Eastern Command’s daily Intelligence Summary, inspection reports, personal letters, messages, and occasional briefing papers. The value of these documents is the detail they provide on the rebellion. Since they have only recently become available, the materials have not been used in any previous account of the rebellion. Their main problems are a lack of continuous coverage, a frequent failure to go beyond the military dimension of events, and an unfamiliarity with local conditions that shows up, for example, in unusual renderings of Korean place and personal names.

The isolation of the island and its neglect by the government were major factors in six rebellions that flared up there during the nineteenth century. All of these uprisings fit into a pattern of traditional peasant rebellion, though one wonders how much this was due to the stereotyped formula by which they were reported and how much to the events themselves. The typical sequence involved in these uprisings ran somewhat as follows. A corrupt or incompetent local magistrate would exploit and tax the islanders until they approached a breaking point. They would then rebel to remove the official who had provoked their wrath. The disturbances were spontaneous outbursts directed at the redress of immediate grievances. As soon as this limited goal was accomplished, the rebellion quickly ran out of momentum. The government would respond by investigating the causes of the disturbance and sending in a few troops to demonstrate that it had regained control. Almost always, the result of the inquiry was to blame the local official for creating the conditions that had led to the rebellion. The government would punish the leaders of the uprising, remove the offending administrator, and accede to the limited demands of the islanders. The uprisings on Cheju-do, in other words, were marked by the same characteristics that have been identified with peasant rebellions elsewhere. They were sporadic, spontaneous, and ephemeral outbursts. The dislocation of Korean society during the last years of the Yi dynasty gave rise, to be sure, to similar rebellions on the mainland. But the geographic conditions of Cheju-do made it especially susceptible to such uprisings.

The first in this series of traditional rebellions occurred in 1813. A plot to attack the administrative offices of the island was discovered just before it could be put into effect, and the chief conspirators were arrested and executed. A second and more serious incident took place in 1863 when the islanders rose up against excessive taxation. The immediate cause of the rebellion was the continued collection of a market tax that had been abolished in the rest of the country years before. Peasants and fishermen, armed with sharpened bamboo spears, occupied all of Cheju city, set fire to its administrative offices, and killed several minor officials. After venting their anger, the rebels disbanded and returned to their homes. Because of the remoteness of the island, it was four months before the government formally restored its authority. After a short investigation, the unfortunate magistrate held responsible for the rebellion was exiled, presumably to an even less inviting place. Responding to the complaints of the “loyal islanders,” the Korean court also issued a proclamation relieving them of back taxes and granting new exemptions. Perhaps because of this tax holiday, the island remained quiet for the next forty years.7

This calm was abruptly broken in the 1890s as the outside world began once more to impinge on the isolation of the island. A small uprising flared up briefly in 1891 and was quickly suppressed. A more serious rebellion burst out five years later when protests against the Kabo reforms, an extensive modernization program instituted by the court under Japanese auspices after Japan’s victory in the Sino-Japanese War, spread to the island from the mainland. A new element of anti-foreignism appeared in these disturbances for the first time. A third uprising occurred in 1898 under the leadership of a certain Pang Sŏng-ch’ŏl in protest against corrupt officials and the imposition of new taxes. The rebels burned government offices and harassed authorities for about a week with hit-and-run attacks before order was restored.

The last and most serious of these incidents took place in the spring of 1901, a year after the Boxer Rebellion in China; the causes were the establishment of a new tax administration and the introduction of Catholicism to the island.8 Beset by financial difficulties, the Korean court decided to create a special tax agency on Cheju-do to tap the revenues it had unwittingly shut off after the rebellion of 1863. The tax officials who now descended on the island went about their task with a vengeance. A new system of cash taxes was imposed, attempts were made to collect taxes remitted years before, and new levies were instituted on farming and fishing. The tax burden became so heavy that nearly 50 percent of “trees, fishing grounds, cows, horses, chickens, and even fish and eggs were taken away.” As if this were not enough, communal lands and government property were auctioned off to raise additional revenue.9

8. Two contemporary accounts of the rebellion are a “free translation” of the report of the district magistrate, Yi Cha-ho, titled “Riots on Cheulepart,” appearing in the Korea Review, June 1901, pp. 265-67; and a Catholic account of the uprising, E. Martel, “The Disturbances on Cheulepart,” The Korea Review, Dec., 1901, pp. 339-42.

34. In Korean with running summary in English. Also, “The Island of Queulepart,” The Korea Review, March 1892, pp. 94-96.
6. On the character of traditional peasant rebellions see, for example, Jean Chesneaux, Peasant Revolts in China (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973).
Christianity, too, was relatively new to the island. Although some Catholics had been exiled to Cheju-do during the Taeôngun’s persecutions in the 1860s, the first congregation was not founded until the visit of a Korean lay missionary just after the 1898 rebellion. The island’s Catholic community grew rapidly following the arrival of French missionaries the next year, to about 1 percent of the island’s population. The appeal of the new religion was not just spiritual. “Rice Christians” attached themselves to the missionaries and Tonghak supporters who had been exiled to the island also joined for shelter against the government. As the most modernized group on the island and the least attached to the traditional social structure, Catholic converts quickly found places on the staff of the tax agency, doing most of the collecting, and benefitting from many of the land deals. An unfortunate, but not entirely unfounded, linkage was thus established between the arrival of the new religion and the economic exploitation of the island.

With these factors at work, opinion on the island rapidly polarized. The native converts, French priests, and tax collectors formed an alliance against which stood many local officials, Japanese traders and smugglers, and most of the population of the island. The villagers soon began to organize themselves into militia groups under the leadership of O Tae-hyôn, the head of the local Confucian society, and Yi Chae-su, a former slave employed by a Japanese fishing concern at Taejông. The self-defense groups were aided by local officials and by Japanese residents who saw their positions being undercut by the priests and tax collectors. The Japanese owner of the fish processing company, Kosen Ryújurô, was particularly instrumental in aiding the militia groups, supplying them with several hundred swords and rifles and instigating them to kill the priests and converts at a crucial point in the rebellion. The island’s Catholics, for their part, resorted to direct action to protect their interests—breaking into the local jail on several occasions, for example, to free fellow believers who they felt were unjustly imprisoned.

These mounting tensions finally exploded into large-scale violence when the missionaries left the island in mid-April on a trip to Seoul. The rebellion was precipitated by a minor brawl between the two sides that rapidly escalated into serious clashes. The island’s badly outnumbered Catholics sought refuge behind the walls of Cheju city where they seized the government arsenal and armed themselves. When the missionaries returned a month later, they found “upwards of a thousand half-starved, frightened Christians” holding off the village militia who ringed the town.

The initial response of the French was to stage a foray into the countryside to quell the rebellion. O Tae-hyôn and a dozen of his followers were captured and brought back into the city. This adventurous act only served, however, to further inflame the islanders. A circular letter condemning the missionaries was drawn up and sent round the island. Several thousand enraged villagers rushed the city walls, but were driven off by the defenders. Thwarted in their attempt to take the city, the islanders now began to slaughter Christian sympathizers remaining in the countryside. According to the report of the local magistrate, “forty to fifty Catholics a day were massacred by the aroused people” in outlying districts for the next two weeks. It was also at this point that Japanese businessmen on the island supplied the village self-defense forces with several hundred weapons.

Coming under increasing pressure from the strengthened militia forces, the missionaries made a belated attempt to defuse the situation by releasing O Tae-hyôn. The effect of this, however, was the opposite of what they had intended. The indignant O stirred up the people of the island further, calling on them “to kill the Catholics like a wolf kills sheep.” As excitement built up, the crowds surrounding Cheju city swelled to a “wild mob estimated at ten thousand islanders.” With food supplies running out, the townspeople turned on the beleaguered Christians and threw open the gates of the city. In the next two days over five hundred persons were massacred. The killing was not confined to Christians: “Everyone who had a grievance, public or private, or a debt, seized his opportunity and killed and looted,

written two years later. There are, of course, major differences of interpretation between the two sources, but they agree on the sequence of events and base their accounts on many of the same materials. A more popular treatment of the history of Catholicism in Korea, Joseph Chang-mun Kim, Catholic Korea: Yesterday and Today (Seoul: Catholic Korea Publishing, 1964), pp. 319-20, sees the motivation of the converts as basically religious: “A group of Catholics having purchased some pieces of land ... began to clear them of brushwood and timber, and ... found it necessary to fell certain old trees which had long been the object of primitive animistic veneration on the part of the pagan majority of the population on the island, and also remove some shamanistic shrines from their newly acquired land in obedience to the Catholic faith and their horror of idolatry.”


11. Ibid., pp. 379, 385, and 392-93. Kim, Historical Record of Cheju-do, p. 283, however, emphasizes the role of Yi Chae-su, and criticizes the Confucian leadership of the rebellion for their vacillating attitude toward the “people’s struggle.” Yu, on the other hand, emphasizes the Confucian character of the uprising, and the participation of Japanese businessmen.


ally or enemy alike. The French priests and a handful of Catholics nevertheless escaped the slaughter, hidden by the magistrate of the island who was understandably fearful of foreign intervention if the missionaries were harmed.

The rioting ended abruptly on May 29 when a squadron of French warships appeared offshore. After some delay in finding Cheju city, the French landed a company of marines on June 1 to secure the gates of the city. A much more serious international incident was narrowly averted by the arrival the next day of William Sands, an American advisor to the Korean court, with a hundred Kangwha soldiers on a coastal steamer. The French were already heavily involved in the occupation of Peking in the aftermath of the Boxer Rebellion and the French commander, seeing that none of their nationalasts had been killed, agreed after negotiations with Sands to “defer to the authority of the Korean court.” Even with the French vessels remaining offshore, where they were soon joined by a Japanese warship, the position of the small government force remained precarious. Fighting continued for a week outside the city where several dozen persons a day were killed.

Negotiations were finally opened with the leaders of the rebellion with political exiles on the island serving as intermediaries. The negotiations nearly collapsed, however, when the head of the tax administration, who had fled the island on the same ship that brought the missionaries back in mid-May, returned as the island’s new magistrate. The countermanding of this ill-considered appointment, the arrival of a new administrator on June 9 with two hundred more troops, continuing “show of force” in which Sands drilled his small detachment outside the city walls, and promises of leniency soon induced the rebels to surrender. According to Sands’s account,

Thousands of rebels came in; I could only estimate them in their huddled masses. They were armed with prehistoric weapons. Some wore armor made of iron plates fastened to a cumbersome leather tunic. . . . Some were dressed in leather cloaks with hairy dogskin hats, like the coon-skin caps of our own pioneer riflemen, the tail of the dog hanging over the shoulder. Some had bows and iron-tipped arrows; others had the usual Korean matchlock guns. Many had spears and flails, made of a short cudgel studded with iron points fastened by two interlocking rings to a long staff. There were many jingals, those long-barreled Malay and Chinese fortress guns, which have to be laid on a wall or heap of rocks to fire them, and are loaded with a handful of slugs, scrap iron or stones. There was a museum collection of small bronze hand cannon, of great age. . . . Also there were some

16. Sands, Undiplomatic Memories, pp. 175-76.
17. Ibid., pp. 176-78; also Yu, Studies on Catholic Persecutions, pp. 445-52, on aftermath of the rebellion; Martel, “Disturbances on Quelepaa.”
rebellion are less clear. They may have been acting out of sympathy with the grievances of the islanders, in their own interest in avoiding new taxes, or from darker motives of furthering penetration of Korea.

The long-range result of the rebellion was to reinforce an already existing tradition of separatism and resistance to excessive governmental demands that was heavily conditioned by the remoteness and strong local traditions of the island. Quite apart from any emotional release that those participating in the rebellion may have obtained, armed protest had shown itself to be a relatively effective way of redressing complaints, given the special circumstances of the island. A similar pattern of collective response reasserted itself again in the 1948 rebellion, though the conditions that made such protests effective in the past had radically changed. Perhaps even the memory of the Sinch’uk uprising was strong enough, two generations later, to be mobilized as part of the revolutionary myth justifying the 1948 rebellion.

POSTWAR DISLOCATION, THE PEOPLE’S COMMITTEE AND THE SAM-IL DEMONSTRATIONS OF 1947

The Japanese colonial period was a time of rapid social and economic change on Cheju-do. The island’s traditional fishing industry was modernized, but was dominated almost entirely by Japanese interests. Many farmers lost their land after a cadastral survey conducted by the new colonial administration. Others were forced to sell their holdings to meet new taxes levied on land. Small canning, brewing, ranching, and porcelain concerns established by Japanese interests did not provide enough employment to absorb the large number of unemployed peoples on the island. When direct ferry service was established to Osaka and passport requirements were removed in the early 1920s, many residents seized the opportunity to escape the poverty, overpopulation, and harsh economic conditions of the island. Emigration to Japan, and later Manchuria, swelled. By 1935, 50,000 islanders were living in Japan, mostly employed in low-wage jobs in Japanese textile, mining, and fishing industries. Five years later, three times that number of Cheju-do natives were residing overseas.

Socialist thought arrived on the island through Japan during the 1920s. The first Marxist study group was organized in 1922 and a branch of the Korean Communist party three years later. Police cracked down on leftists in several waves of arrests over the next few years. But despite occasional strikes and demonstrations by dockworkers, farmers, and diving women, there was little resistance to Japanese rule. The only large-scale protest was a student strike in 1931 precipitated by the refusal of school authorities to award diplomas to socialist students. Demonstrations spread throughout the island’s schools and were serious enough for police reinforcements to be called in from the mainland. On the whole, though, according to at least to occasional remarks in American sources, the islanders “got on well with the Japanese who encouraged their separatist feelings.” From what information is available, the Japanese were apparently somewhat less prejudiced towards the islanders, whom they regarded as naïve, honest, and hard-working, than to other Koreans.

The Japanese military presence on Cheju-do also grew rapidly during these years. Local labor was mobilized to build roads, port facilities, and other military installations. A large airbase was constructed at Mokpo that was later used to stage bombing raids on Nanking during the war with China in the 1930s. Settlement of Japanese on the island was encouraged, and visits by foreigners were tightly controlled for security reasons. Cheju-do took on even greater strategic importance for Japan after the start of the Pacific war. Fearing that an invasion of the home islands might come through Cheju, the Japanese heavily garrisoned it and turned Hallasan into a labyrinth of fortifications in preparation for an American attack. There were more troops than civilians on the island during the last year of the war. Elements of six infantry divisions, several independent infantry and cavalry brigades, and substantial naval and air forces were stationed on Cheju-do, probably numbering at their peak nearly a quarter of a million men. This intense militarization of the island must have greatly expanded the island’s labor force.

21. Ibid., p. 319, gives a different view of the exploitation of Cheju islanders in Japan.

19. Kim, Historical Record of Cheju-do, chap. 9, for changes on “Cheju-do under the Japanese Occupation”; see also pp. 317-19.
affected the lives of the residents remaining on Cheju-do, but very little is known about this period.

American forces first arrived on Cheju-do on September 28, 1945, when a small party of officers flew in to receive the surrender of the Japanese on the island. Although there was some concern that the Japanese forces might resist, the local commander had dutifully carried out his orders from Seoul to collect all stocks of ammunition and explosives and to destroy them by dumping at sea. All small arms, except for 5 percent retained for guards, were also gathered and stored in depots at Cheju city. Some arms undoubtedly remained behind, but the subsequent claim that the island was full of abandoned Japanese weapons is probably exaggerated.

The evacuation of the Japanese garrison by landing ships to Sasebo began on October 22 and was completed three weeks later. Altogether, over 50,000 military and civilian personnel were repatriated in this operation, the remainder of the Japanese on the island at the time of the surrender having made their own arrangements for returning home. A much more massive flow poured in from Japan and Manchuria as Korean natives of the island made their way back to Cheju-do. The civilian population of the island nearly doubled, approaching 300,000 persons in the months after liberation.

The United States Military Government was slow to extend its control to the island. There was also considerable turnover in American military units assigned to Cheju-do. A field artillery battalion handled the repatriation program and destroyed the heavier ordinance left by the departing Japanese. It was not until mid-November that the Fifty-ninth Military Government Company finally arrived. During this period, the People's Committee managed to firmly establish itself as "the only party on the island, and to all extents and purposes, the only government."23

The committee was established on Cheju-do on September 23, five days before the arrival of the first Americans. At first it was only one of the several competing youth groups and political associations that sprang up on the island after liberation "like bamboo shoots after a rain." The continuing presence of Japanese troops on Cheju-do for the next month also inhibited its activities. The political situation

... on the island remained unsettled as several groups strove for control. The issue was settled decisively in early November in an armed clash between leftist and rightist groups in which more than a hundred persons were injured.24 Thereafter, the committee was in complete control.

The same process of gradually squeezing moderate elements out of the People's Committees that occurred on the mainland soon followed on Cheju-do. The "central revolutionary organ" of the Democratic People's Front was established on the island in February 1946 under the "main faction" leadership of the South Korean Labor party (SKLP). The whole constellation of mass organizations spun off from the committee (including women's groups, a farmers' cooperative, a fishermen's guild, a consumers' club, labor unions, a teachers' guild, and a cultural association) convened to pass resolutions condemning the "colonial policy of the American imperialists and supporting the decision of the (four power) Moscow Conference" that provided for a period of trusteeship for Korea.25

From the start, however, the Cheju-do committee displayed a strong spirit of independence. It was reluctant to subordinate itself to the South Cholla provincial committee, maintaining that the administrative jurisdiction exercised by that province over the island during the colonial period had ended with liberation. The committee was adamant in insisting that Cheju-do should now revert to its pre-colonial status as a separate province, a move that, if adopted, would also raise the status of the committee from a county to a provincial level unit.26 This long-established pattern of independent action by the Cheju-do committee should be borne in mind when analyzing the causes of the April 1948 rebellion.

Despite its occasional lapses into anti-American rhetoric, the committee maintained a close working relationship with the military government company on the island during the first year of the occupation. The company used the committee in administering the island

24. Among these groups were the Moscow Alliance, Halla Corps, White Deer Society (named for the lake of that name in the crater of Halla mountain), Confucian Society, and Buddhist Society. Kim, Materials on the April 3 Armed Uprising, p. 13; Meade, American Military Government, p. 185.
26. Meade, American Military Government, p. 186. Kim, Historical Record of Cheju-do, p. 149, gives a brief and somewhat confused history of the administrative status of the island during the Yi dynasty. It appears from Kim's account that Cheju-do may have become part of Cholla Province only in the 1890s when it was made one of its four prefectures (pu).
and gave it its "wholehearted support." This surprising cooperation was probably due to a realistic perception by the company of the distribution of power on the island. The military government company also supported the effort to make the island a separate province. Such a move would only formally ratify the large measure of independent authority it already exercised. The company had found it easier to by-pass the provincial level on most matters to deal directly with Seoul. While courier flights and telephone communications with Cheolla Province were dependable, regular weekly flights were made from Seoul to provide the Army "brass" with opportunities to hunt game on the island.27

The relationship between the military government company and the People's Committee began to sour almost as soon as the island was granted provincial status. The new officer appointed military governor of Cheju-do was not sympathetic to the committee. More important, the island had been a province for only two months when the "October People's Resistance" broke out on the mainland at Taegu. Precipitated by the suppression of a railroad workers' strike and forced grain collections, violent protests spread through many parts of the southern zone. Several hundred police and demonstrators were killed before American tactical troops were able to quell the disturbances.28 The attitude of occupation forces toward the Left suddenly hardened. The paramount concerns were now control and internal security, goals that could hardly be reconciled with cooperation with the People's Committees, even on remote Cheju-do.

The committee now found itself turned out of office and vulnerable to attack by resurgent rightist groups. A clash occurred in October when members of the Halla Corps, a rightist group, attempted to break up a committee meeting. Several leftists were arrested and fined for their participation in the incident, though the rightist instigators went unpunished. Though still not driven underground, the committee was greatly cramped in its organizational activities.29 The year during which it had controlled the island had given the committee a great deal of legitimacy among the residents of the island. Deprived of its access to power, the committee became increasingly antagonistic toward the military authorities and mobilized the growing discontent of the islanders.


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Poor economic conditions fanned this smoldering resentment on the island.30 The disruption of established trade patterns, the closing of military bases, the massive repatriation of islanders from overseas, and the loss of their remittances all strained the fragile economy of Cheju-do. Raw materials produced in the North, moreover, were no longer available. Night fishing, for example, had to be severely curtailed because of an acute shortage of carbon for use in fishing lamps. The output of a distillery and power plant, which purchased much of the sweet potato crop and generated electricity for Cheju city, was greatly reduced by shortages of coal. Agricultural production also fell since fertilizer formerly supplied from northern chemical plants was no longer available. Even the granting of provincial status to the island created new and largely unforeseen problems. The already depressed economy now had to bear the new burden of supporting an additional layer of government. Residents of the island also began to encounter difficulties in marketing their produce on the mainland. Police at the port of Mokpo began to collect customs duties on goods shipped from the new province and to charge heavy landing fees to travelers.31

Violence first flared up on Cheju-do during the Sam-il demonstrations of 1947. The protests started with a series of meetings (in defiance of a prohibition by the military authorities) held to commemorate the March 1 anniversary of the Korean independence movement against the Japanese. The gatherings soon turned into massive demonstrations against the formation of the South Korean Interim Government and for unification of the country based on the decisions of the Moscow Conference and the March 1 spirit.32 An attempt by the military government company to break up a meeting in one Cheju city school served only to provoke the participants, who spilled out of the schoolyard into the streets. A huge crowd of over twenty thousand


people assembled in the city square. The demonstrators were joined by government employees, who walked out on strike. The swirling crowd overturned police barricades and surged toward the administration building of the island. American troops and Korean police fired over the heads of the crowd at this point and succeeded in dispersing the demonstrators. Serious violence was barely avoided, but a child was shot and killed. Similar demonstrations were being held throughout the island at the same time, most of them nonviolent. All schools, businesses, and government offices were closed down. Responding to the patriotic mood of the occasion, police, soldiers, and even a Coast Guard band joined the demonstrations in some localities.33

Among the persons arrested in the wake of the demonstrations were two organizers from the SKLP who had been sent to the island from the mainland. A week after the Sam-il demonstrations, a crowd of over a thousand persons armed with rocks and clubs gathered in front of the Ch'ŏng-myŏn jail demanding the release of prisoners. When the demonstrators began throwing rocks and pressed in on the jail, the police inside panicked and opened fire. Five persons were killed in the attack.34

A general strike called on March 9 to protest the Ch'ŏng-myŏn incident paralyzed all administration on the island. The strikers demanded that the police be punished and purged of Japanese collaborators, that those injured in the incident be compensated and those arrested immediately released, and that the United States-Soviet Joint Commission be reconvened. None of these demands was met. Instead, the Military Government sent additional security forces to reinforce its control of the island. About 400 police were dispatched from the mainland to strengthen the local force of 300 men. More importantly, a large number of extreme right-wing Northwest Youth Group members were brought in to help the police. Although it is not clear just how many were sent, a Communist source states that 800 were stationed in towns throughout Cheju-do.35

These reinforcements came to the “red island” with many scores to settle. Only a half-year had passed since the bloody Taegu riots in which more than 400 police had been killed. The Northwest Youth Group, too, was composed of strongly anti-Communist refugees from

33. FEC, History of U.S. Army Forces in Korea, part 3, pp. 1-2; Kim, Cheju-do, pp. 45-47.
34. FEC, History of U.S. Army Forces in Korea, part 3, p. 2; Kim, Cheju-do, p. 59.

North Korea whose members adopted terroristic methods to fight the SKLP and to avenge themselves for being driven from their homes in the North. The group operated without even the minimal constraints that, in theory at least, limited the police.

The sudden introduction of these large government forces also worsened the already depressed economy of the island, which now had to support these new police and right-wing youth group members. Police salaries were notoriously low and had to be supplemented by various forms of graft. The Northwest Youth Association members received no regular salary and had to live entirely off the land. The unsettled state of public order on Cheju-do, needless to say, provided both groups with ample opportunities for shakedowns, blackmail, protection rackets, and similar gangsterlike activities.

A cycle of terror and counterterror soon developed. Police and rightists brutalized the islanders who retaliated as best they could. One of the first incidents occurred at the village of Chongdal in June. When leftists killed several police near the village, a large force of police and rightist youth retaliated by surrounding Chongdal and arbitrarily pulling out several of its residents for summary execution.36 While the police were temporarily successful in intimidating the population with such tactics, their indiscriminate use of force embittered the islanders and further alienated them from the government. The sudden shift from an excessively permissive policy in the first year of the occupation to excessively coercive measures in the aftermath of the Sam-il demonstrations increased unrest on the island. Cheju-do was building toward an explosion.

THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT OF THE REBELLION,
AND ITS MASS AND ORGANIZATIONAL BASE

A chill in Soviet-American relations began to set in early in 1947.37 Faced with massive tasks of reconstruction and blocked by continuing Soviet obstructionism, American policy shifted from seeking negotiated settlements of postwar issues to creating “situations of strength.” Initiatives poured forth in the spring of the year: the Truman doctrine in March, the Marshall plan in June, and “containment” in July. Indian

summer lingered on for a few months more. As the Soviets searched for appropriate responses, few more.

As the Joint Commission reached agreement on the South, the Commission on the North deliberated over the proposed withdrawal of the occupation forces. The Soviets, refusing to accept American proposals for the unification of the two countries, insisted on the withdrawal of American forces as a condition for discussing the future of the peninsula. The United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK) was established to supervise the withdrawal. The intransigence of the two sides led to the failure of the Joint Commission's efforts.

The American-sponsored resolution calling for the establishment of an independent Korean government was adopted by the General Assembly. The South Korean government was formed, with Syngman Rhee as its leader. The American administration gradually turned its attention towards the conflict in Vietnam, leaving Korea to its own devices. The summer of 1954 marked the end of the Korean War, and the United States and South Korea began to negotiate over the future of the Korean peninsula. The Cold War intensified, with the United States supporting South Korea and the Soviet Union supporting North Korea. The Korean War had ended, but the tensions between the two Koreas remained.

The summer of 1954 marked the end of the Korean War, and the United States and South Korea began to negotiate over the future of the Korean peninsula. The Cold War intensified, with the United States supporting South Korea and the Soviet Union supporting North Korea. The Korean War had ended, but the tensions between the two Koreas remained. The Korean War had resulted in a division of the peninsula, with South Korea and North Korea remaining divided. The United States and South Korea continued to support the South, while North Korea continued to receive support from the Soviet Union and China. The Korean War had ended, but the tensions between the two Koreas remained.
in “every” village and town on the island. This heavy concentration of Communist support in a remote area with a long tradition of rebellion had important consequences. It probably pushed opposition to the separate elections beyond what was desirable in a tactical sense and beyond what was intended by the central leadership of the SKLP. The “open gate” recruitment policy, aimed at maximizing SKLP membership on the island, also had adverse effects once the rebellion broke out, since many persons of marginal commitment had been brought into the party.

In addition to its sheer size, the Cheju-do branch of the SKLP also developed a highly complex organization. The party structure on the island was capped by twin military and political committees. Subordinate bureaus included groups for organization, finance, propaganda, logistics, intelligence, women’s, youth, and peasant affairs. A breakdown of the party’s organizational structure and the persons occupying major posts at the time of the rebellion was as follows:

**Secretaries of the Cheju Branch Political Committee:** An Yo-gom, Cho Mong-gu, Kim Yu-hwan, Kang Ki-chan, and Kim Yong-gwan; **Members of the Military Committee:** Kim Tal-sam (Yi Sŏng-jin), Kim Tae-ji, Yi Tŏk-kuu; **Organization Bureau:** Yi Chwa-gu, Kim Tŭborg; **General Affairs Department:** Yi Chong-u, Ko Chil-jong, Kim Min-saeng, Kim Yang-gum; **Treasurer:** Hyŏn Pok-ryu; **Propaganda Bureau:** Kim Un-han, Kim Sŏk-hwan; **Youth Affairs:** Kang Tae-sŏk; **Logistics:** Kim Kwi-han; **Intelligence:** Kim Tae-je; **Women’s Affairs:** Ko Chin-hwi; **Peasant Affairs:** Kim Wan-bae.

Since none of these figures is mentioned as initially prominent in the People’s Committee, a major leadership change must have occurred sometime in 1947. The original leaders were probably displaced by returnees to the island, either after the committee fell out of favor with the Military Government, or at the time of the Sam-il demonstrations, possibly, as the SKLP sought to assert greater control over the Cheju-do branch. Many of these new leaders were well-educated “student draftees” who had been conscripted for service in the Japanese Army. Some had attended middle-level Japanese universities. It seems likely, then, that a more militarily experienced, better educated, younger, and more radical leadership gained control of the SKLP organization on Cheju-do in the year before the rebellion.

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44. Kim, Cheju-do, p. 88.
46. Kim Min-sŏng, who became the chief of the organization section of the Cheju party branch, for example, was a graduate of Meiji University. Hunguk chŏnjaeng-sa, p. 447. Kim Tal-sam was a “student draftee,” p. 458. Kongbi yŏn-

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Merrill: The Cheju-do Rebellion

The People’s Liberation Army, headed by Kim Tal-sam, a schoolteacher and one of the student draftees, consisted of 400 main force guerrillas with headquarters on Halla mountain. They were supported by as many as 4,000 members of self-defense groups organized “in every country, subcountry, and in the villages” of the island. Only about 200 were armed with rifles at the start of the rebellion. Caves and field fortifications built by the Japanese on the mountain provided ample shelter. Food and other supplies were also stockpiled in preparation for fighting.

In addition to the party organization and guerrilla units, People’s Struggle Committees were formed as the date for elections approached. The SKLP was successful in winning over many government officials who were natives of the island. According to a South Korean account, the governor was persuaded to take on the chairmanship of the Struggle Committee, the mayor of Cheju city was made vice-chairman, and several myŏn heads were put in charge of local committees. The constabulary regiment stationed on the island was also heavily infiltrated by SKLP supporters. The guerrillas tried to present themselves as friendly to the soldiers, and to exploit conflicts between them and the police. The SKLP achieved considerable success in this effort, and the doubtful loyalty of the constabulary was a major factor in expanding the initial scope of the rebellion.

The tight clan structure and localism of the islanders were two more factors contributing to the strength of the SKLP. The island’s social structure was dominated by three major clans. Nearly all its inhabitants had close relatives who were associated with the guerrillas. Except for the constabulary, which was locally recruited, the government forces were outsiders who had no roots on the island. This in-group, out-group syndrome was reinforced by the distinctive dialect spoken on the island. For these reasons, as well as its difficult living conditions and “low cultural level,” mainland officials viewed Cheju-do as an undesirable assignment to be gotten over as quickly as possible. Most took little interest in their jobs; “Usually the officials from the mainland come to this island under the condition of raising one degree in their ranks. But most of them are unstable in their attitude, in other words, they lack the sincerity to work permanently for this island. Even the high officials come here alone, without bring-

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47. FEC, History of U.S. Army Forces in Korea, part 3, p. 20; and Hunguk chŏnjaeng-sa, pp. 437-38.
49. Ibid., p. 439.
ing their families with them. As they haven’t any intention of living long on this island, their administrative policies, naturally, tend to be irresponsible and unstable.\textsuperscript{50}

The government provided few programs for the island, and its officials made virtually no effort to inform its population of national events and policy.\textsuperscript{51} The well-organized SKLP, by way of contrast, seems to have dominated communications on the island through its highly developed network of party groups and mass organizations. National communications media barely extended to Cheju-do. Radio listening was limited because of the shortage of electrical power, and the island had only a single newspaper in Cheju city.\textsuperscript{52} On both the “input” and “output” sides, government on the island was weak. This, combined with the period of nearly a year in which the People’s Committee had been in control, endowed the SKLP with legitimacy among the people of the island. Once the rebellion broke out, most of the island went over to the side of the guerrillas as a more or less automatic response.

THE FEBRUARY 1948 GENERAL STRIKE

For the first five months of 1948, Korean politics revolved around the issue of unification and the role that the United Nations commission might play in helping to achieve it. Although the commission was established with a mandate to observe elections for a national assembly, its purpose was not well defined. Members of the commission had differing opinions of what they should try to accomplish in Korea; some doubted the wisdom of the whole enterprise. Although many allies of the United States were represented on the commission, its members were determined to establish the commission’s independence and impartiality. One of its first steps was to address identical letters to the commanders in both zones asking for their assistance in its efforts. There was no direct response from the Soviets, although the commission was told informally that the question of the future of Korea could not be solved locally and should be dealt with in bilateral negotiations at the foreign minister’s level.\textsuperscript{53} This negative response and the continuing refusal of the Soviets to permit the commission access to the northern zone caused a great deal of doubt and discussion within UNTOCOK over what its role should be.

Many commission members were concerned that the two superpowers were heading for a major confrontation, and did not want to take any action in Korea that would increase international tensions. They were also deeply impressed by the arguments of Korean moderates, especially Kim Kyu-sik, that separate elections in the South would only serve to perpetuate the division of the country and drive the North permanently into the Soviet orbit. The commission doubted, moreover, that free elections could be held in the South given the tense political atmosphere then prevailing in the American zone. Agreeing that they should not rush ahead with elections, the commission members decided to try to find a formula that would reconcile the Soviet and American positions. During the first week in February, therefore, the commission resolved to refer the whole question of holding elections back to the United Nations Interim Assembly for decision. Most members were convinced that even if elections were held they should only be for a consultative body, and should not result in the establishment of a South Korean government.\textsuperscript{54}

The Communist campaign against the commission opened in mid-December, and was relatively mild at first. Its main themes were that the establishment of the United Nations commission was inconsistent with the agreements on Korea reached between the United States and the Soviet Union at the Moscow Conference, and that the best way to achieve unification was to accept the Soviet proposals for the simultaneous withdrawal of all occupation forces from the peninsula. The moderate tone of the initial criticisms of the commission seemed to bear out reports from the North that the authorities there had not yet foreclosed the possibility of dealing with the commission. After the arrival of the United Nations body in January, however, the Communist position began to harden. The unfolding campaign against the commission now entered a much more strident phase. Led by Radio Pyöngyang, newspapers controlled by the SKLP, handbills, and wall posters in the South hammered away at the commission, attacking its composition and demanding the immediate implementation of the Moscow agreements.\textsuperscript{55}

South Korean Communists were apparently divided over the proper strategy to follow in opposing the work of the commission. A directive issued by the Korean Democratic People’s Front seemed


\textsuperscript{51} Memo by Lester Chorpening, Advisor to Korean National Police, “Police Situation on Cheju-do,” dated April 19, 1948, Records Group 332.

\textsuperscript{52} Cho, “Opinion on the Settlement of the Cheju Situation.”

\textsuperscript{53} FEC, Intelligence Summary, Feb. 11, March 15, and Feb. 5, 1948.

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., Feb. 5 and 11, 1948.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., Jan. 19 and 17, 1948, and Jan. 20 and 30, 1948. One third of the Seoul newspapers were still controlled by leftist groups at this time.
to indicate deep pessimism over the direction that events were taking, declaring that "Our opportunity to stage a revolution or mass riots virtually has passed, leaving us powerless to take physical means of opposing the elections." The document went on to state that the SKLP now had to place its hopes for eventual success in a united front with leftist forces in North Korea, China, and Japan. For the moment, according to the report, the most that southern Communists could do was to continue the propaganda campaign against the elections and to attempt to discredit its results. A different assessment of the situation, however, was apparently reached by Pak Hŏn-yŏng, the leader of the SKLP. Pak had fled to the North early in 1947 after the Taegu riots, but continued to direct the Communist movement in the South from headquarters in the northern border city of Haeju. Sometime in mid-January, Pak decided that the elections had to be opposed by violent means. Responding to his orders, the executive committee of the party in Seoul sent liaison personnel to all provincial branches with orders to coordinate disturbances directed against the work of the commission. Early in February, Pak issued a five-point order for a general strike:

1. The SKLP has fought gallantly under police and Military Government oppression—all party members must continue the fight.
2. The reactionary oppression is so great that we must use "hit and run" tactics.
3. We have the October People's Resistance of 1946 as an example. We must start another People's Resistance in protest to the United Nations general election.
4. The SKLP has been fighting the reactionary Rhee Syngman and Kim Ku and their followers. Hereafter, we must also fight Kim Kyu-sik and his followers.
5. We must organize the People's Committee in the counties, townships and villages, then we must fight to gain political control and turn this over to the People's Committee.

There was high-level opposition within the SKLP to this strategy from members who thought that the party's strength had been too weakened by the August wave of arrests to mount a successful resistance campaign, and that cooperation with UNTCOK might still be possible. Nevertheless, Pak pushed ahead with his plan.

It is uncertain just what motivation lay behind Pak's shift in tactics. Since the divisions within UNTCOK were the subject of widespread public speculation at the time, Pak may have felt that demonstrating

56. Ibid., Feb. 6, 1948.
57. Ibid., Jan. 20, 1948.
58. Ibid., Feb. 6, 1948.
60. USAFIK, South Korean Interim Government Activities, Feb. 1948.
62. FEC, Intelligence Summary, March 11, 1948.
A Communist source describes the initial “February People’s Resistance” on Cheju-do as follows: “Two days before the General Strike, the people in Sŏgwip’o confronted the government forces successfully, and almost two hundred young men from Han’gyŏng myŏn attacked the police substation in Kosan demanding the release of arrested strikers. The animals fired on them indiscriminately. The people of Kujwa-myŏn attacked the Sehwa-gun police substation. . . . On February 7 and 8, the people held a massive demonstration and finally attacked the government’s bases. In the night they held torches signifying their resistance to the Americans and to the government’s policies.”

Following these events, members of the People’s Liberation Army, armed with Japanese rifles, grenades, and swords, attacked the police substation at Andŏk. Between February 13 and 15, guerrillas engaged police and rightist youth in a string of running battles in the vicinity of Hallim. According to a South Korean account, sporadic violence continued into March with demonstrations on Sam-il day and several sabotage incidents on March 9. Several hundred persons were also involved in a clash with government forces near Aewŏi when a leftist meeting was broken up. Later in the month, guerrillas again attacked police stations in the vicinity of Aewŏi.

North Korean party historians have been extremely critical of Pak Hŏn-yŏng’s role in calling the February general strike. While the heroism of the participants in the February People’s Resistance is praised, the strike itself is seen as a disaster—an “adventurous charge” that needlessly exposed the party organization in the South to attack and nearly destroyed it. Although these criticisms may have been intended primarily to discredit Pak following his purge soon after the end of the Korean War, the indictment has considerable force, especially when applied to the unique conditions that the SKLP had to face on Cheju-do. “It should be noted that the leaders of these resistance movements did not consider the power balance between themselves and the enemy, the geographical condition of the island, and how to preserve the revolutionary ferment there. Their way of resistance, therefore, inclined towards a radical, adventurist path, a so-called struggle for struggle’s sake, and their leadership weakened the consolidation of the revolutionary forces on the island.”

The United States proposal to proceed with separate elections in that part of Korea that was accessible to the United Nations commission was overwhelmingly adopted by the Interim Assembly on February 26. The news was received with dismay by many members of the commission who felt that the decision represented a virtual “coup” that ran counter to their “nearly unanimous opinion.” After considerable debate, the commission decided to go ahead with supervising the elections and to attempt to ensure that a free atmosphere prevailed. The North Korean response came in a radio broadcast on March 25, inviting leaders of southern political parties and social organizations to a joint conference in P’yŏngyang to solve the unification problem and draw up a draft constitution. The pull of this proposal was sufficiently strong to draw many moderate, and even some rightist, opponents of Rhee to the conference that opened in the northern capital in mid-April.

The April 3 attacks were no more serious than an earlier series of raids on police stations in North Cholla Province in late February that may have served as a model. A senior constabulary officer visiting Cheju-do attached so little importance to the guerrilla attacks, in fact, that he returned to the mainland the next day, as planned, to take up a new assignment. The violence on the island appears to have been little mentioned at the P’yŏngyang Conference two weeks later, in marked contrast to the heavy attention it received at another conference at Haeju in late August.

63. Kim, Cheju-do, p. 74.
64. Ibid., pp. 75, 81; Hanguk chŏnjaeng-sa, p. 438.
67. FEC, Intelligence Summary, March 15, 1948, and May 5 and 12, 1948. A North Korean film of the conference captured during the Korean war is available at the National Archives, Records Group 242.
68. Ibid., March 11, 1948; Sasaki, Hangukchŏn pisa 1:266. In speeches made by Pak Hŏn-yŏng, for example, on “The South Korean Political Situation,” and by Hŏ Hŏn on “The Plan of the Opposition Struggle Against the South Korean
April uprising, in short, is that it set in motion a much more violent cycle of resistance and repression on the island that soon swung wildly out of control.

The April 3 attacks grew out of the SKLP's campaign against separate elections in the southern zone, but were probably undertaken by the militant local leadership of the Cheju party on its own initiative. The long-standing grievances of the islanders, their tradition of separatism, the increasing repression that followed the February general strike, and the intensely politicized atmosphere that built up as the date for elections approached spurred the local leadership to action. According to a South Korean source, "After the [February General Strike] democratic groups such as the Unification Youth Corps and the Northwest Young Men's Association were strengthened in order to guard against the Communists [on the island]; and officially, the police observed more thoroughly and arrested suspicious persons. The guerrillas were forced to take to the mountains."

The decision to take up arms, from what information is available, seems to have been made at a meeting in late March attended by the heads of the Cheju party's military and political wings, Kim Ta-lun and Cho No-gu, together with the leader of its cells in the constabulary, Lieutenant Mun Sang-gil. Captured SKLP instructions issued to party branches throughout the South at about this time seemed to advise a more carefully modulated campaign against the elections. The documents reportedly ordered local committees to disrupt the elections and collect weapons, but to minimize SKLP responsibility for the incidents so as not to create a backlash by voters against its "unofficial candidates." The subsequent invitation to southern leaders to attend the P'yŏn yang Conference would have provided even greater incentive to keep the attacks under control.

The attacks began without warning in the early morning hours of April 3. Guerrilla units assaulted more than half of the twenty-four police boxes on the island, mostly along the northern shore. The strength of the insurgent's main force units was about 500 men. Half were armed with rifles, while the rest carried an assortment of swords, sickles, sharpened bamboo spears, "homemade grenades, various types of explosives, and picks and shovels." As many as 3,000 persons may have accompanied the guerrilla bands down from the mountain. Additional supporters were gathered in the coastal villages. Government forces on the island consisted of 450 police, an understrength constabulary regiment, and several hundred members of right-wing youth groups. While pressing home their attacks with great ferocity, the guerrillas directed them only at police and rightist youth. A U.S. Army military government company stationed on the island was not involved in the fighting. The police and rightist youth, tied down in manning police boxes and guarding government offices, were ineffective in coping with the attacks. By concentrating on the northern coastal villages and moving swiftly, the guerrillas were able to overpower their opponents. In the first wave of attacks, they had much the better of it. Government casualties were about 30 killed, while the guerrillas lost only 4 men.

According to a Communist account, the guerrillas explained the reasons for their attacks in the following appeal: "Dear citizens, parents, brothers and sisters! Today, on April 3, your sons and brothers have stood up with arms in hand. We oppose the country-selling separate elections to the death, and have risen up in order to liberate the people, unify the fatherland, and achieve independence. We have stood up with arms to get rid of the American cannibals and their running dogs, to destroy them, and to stop them from killing people. We have stood up to avenge your grievances for you! You should also rise up to help us fight for final victory!" Similar slogans appealed to individual members of the police and rightist youth to come over to the side of the guerrillas.

The guerrillas did not follow up their initial successes, but fell back to the safety of Halla mountain, anticipating a strong government counterattack. The insurgent's base areas were located high on the mountain near the villages of Asusun, Nokame, and Ta Nakkung. Asusun was said to be the main headquarters where over 300 guerrillas were located. Fear of government retaliation was apparently shared by many villages. An American police advisor, who visited Cheju-do two weeks after the April attacks, noted that most of the men in the villages on the northern half of the island had fled into the hills with the guerrillas.

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70. Ibid., p. 10.
71. FEC, Intelligence Summary, April 22, 1948.
72. Kongbi t'ŏbŏ-isa, p. 10. Also Chorpening, "Police Situation on Cheju-do."
73. FEC, History of U.S. Army Forces in Korea, part 3, pp. 4, 17.
74. Chorpening, "Police Situation on Cheju-do.
75. Kim, Cheju-do, p. 85.
76. Chorpening, "Police Situation." Asusun is probably Osŏngsang-orŭm; I have not been able to locate the other place names.
The Military Government was quick to send reinforcements. One company of police, 1,700 men, was pulled from each of the southern provinces and sent to the island. A constabulary battalion (approximately 800 men) was also dispatched to bring the regiment already there up to strength. Constabulary troops were assigned to guard coastal villages to free the police for operations against the guerrillas in the interior of the island. The first major battle did not occur until April 17 when about 150 guerrillas were attacked by the constabulary near Samyang and several of them were killed or captured. On the same day, the guerrillas reportedly ambushed a police patrol near Hamdok and captured several police. "People's trials" were held, after which the prisoners were given over to the women of the band for execution, since it was they "who had suffered most from them." 77

Sporadic fighting continued on Cheju-do throughout April. Toward the end of the month, government forces began carrying out screening operations in the major towns to weed out dissidents. In one of these operations, Cheju city was cordoned off by a strong constabulary force, while the police conducted a house-to-house search for Communist sympathizers. The results of the operation were inconclusive, as were most of the forays of the security forces into the countryside. The police, who were responsible for conducting these operations, were not strong enough to attack the main guerrilla bases without the support of the constabulary. The guerrillas made a sharp distinction between the constabulary and police, avoiding engagements with the former and mercilessly setting upon the latter at every opportunity. The constabulary, for its part, tried to avoid becoming involved in the fighting. Many of its members felt that the grievances of the islanders were justified and that the rebellion was really a quarrel between the people and police. The morale of the police, especially in outlying areas, was extremely low. One American observer reported that, understandably, many policemen "appeared to be very nervous and jittery." 78

These tensions among the security forces culminated in the defection of the greater part of a constabulary company, between 40 and 100 soldiers, to the guerrillas on April 29. Although pursued by loyal government troops, the rebels doubled back to capture an armory and forced more soldiers to accompany them. The defecting troops cut a swath through several southwestern coastal villages as they advanced on Sögwp'o. At Taejöng myŏn, they gathered several police and rightist youth together in front of a police box, accused them of being reactionary elements, and shot them to death. Soon after, loyal constabulary forces caught up with the deserters and encircled them. In the ensuing battle, 20 of the defectors were killed and several score captured, while the remaining rebels escaped to join forces with the guerrillas. 79

As the situation on the island continued to deteriorate, Seoul newspapers began to speculate that American tactical forces might have to be sent in to restore order. The accounts put the strength of the guerrillas at 3,000 "armed rioters" and reported that they had occupied Japanese fortifications on Halla mountain, where they were well supplied with food and ammunition. The guerrillas were said to disguise themselves as farmers during the day and to launch attacks against the government forces at night. Atrocity stories also began to appear in the papers with greater frequency.80 It appeared that conditions on Cheju-do were getting out of hand and that the government forces on the island were losing their ability to contain the rebellion.

Two days after the constabulary defection, Major General William F. Dean, the U.S. Military Governor, flew to Cheju-do to reassure public opinion and to personally inspect the situation on the island. A silent film, "May Day on Cheju-do," a title a bit too obviously laden with meaning, provides a visual record of conditions on the island at the time of the general's visit. 81 The movie opens with shots of a plane circling the island with plumes of smoke rising in the background from burning villages. Next are scenes of police advancing across a field in a simulated attack on guerrillas. Dean makes a brief appearance inspecting Military Government headquarters and harbor facilities. The camera then pans over burning homes, as a distraught woman explains to constabulary troops how her village was attacked by guerrillas. Bodies of men and women killed by Communists are shown briefly before the camera cuts to a close-up of a coffinmaker planing a wooden box. Business obviously is brisk. The film closes with another

77. Han'guk ch'ŏnjaeng-sa, p. 438; Kongbi t'oebsa, p. 87; Kim, Cheju-do, pp. 90-91.
78. Chorpening, "Police Situation."
79. The accounts in both Han'guk ch'ŏnjaeng-sa, p. 440, and Kim, Cheju-do, p. 103, agree in general on this incident. Kim, however, maintains that Mun Sang-gil led the April 27 mutiny while the former states, on p. 441, that Mun's membership in the SKLP was not discovered until June 1948. Lee and Scalapino, Communism in Korea, p. 308, state that the April 5 rebellion was led by "military units under the direction of Mun Sang-gil." Obviously, Mun's role in these events is far from clear.
80. USAFIK, South Korean Interim Government Activities, May 1948, pp. 156-57, and April, p. 179.
aerial view, this time of the burning village of Orari, scenes of constabulary troops advancing towards it, and close-ups of police road blocks and strong points.

As a result of the general’s visit, another battalion was sent to the island on May 5 to bring the regiment there up to its full strength of three battalions. Dean also attempted to smooth over the differences between the constabulary and police, which had hampered the government in dealing with the rebellion, by appointing a more cooperative police chief who was a native of Cheju-do. It was necessary, in addition, to reorganize the civilian administration of the island, whose governor had apparently gone over to the rebels as chairman of the People’s Struggle Committee. Dean’s final action was to appoint a new constabulary commander, Pak Chin-gyong, to head the strengthened regiment, with orders to take a more active role in suppressing the rebellion. With only a week left, all these efforts were needed if elections were to be held on the island on May 10 as scheduled.

THE MAY 10 ELECTION

Despite the last-minute measures taken by General Dean to save the elections on the island, conditions on Cheju-do continued to deteriorate. According to an unpublished Military Government history, “As election day (May 10) drew near, Communist attacks increased in frequency. During the week immediately preceding the elections, one attack was made on a police wire repair crew and five on police boxes. One policeman was killed, as were also twenty-one members of rightist groups and police families.” Extensive precautions were undertaken to protect polling places. Community protective associations made up of rightist youth group members were established on Cheju-do, as elsewhere in the South. Barricades were erected around government buildings and voting places, a curfew imposed on the island, and road blocks set up to restrict the movement of the guerrillas.

Some idea of the militarized atmosphere that surrounded the elections is given by an American report of conditions at polls on the mainland. The main responsibility for “processing” voters was given to community protective associations and police. Three or four members of right-wing groups, dressed in civilian clothes and carrying identifying armbands, were stationed in front of each voting station. A similar number of police were usually also present. After undergoing

82. Hanguk čonjaeng-sa, p. 440.
83. FEC, History of U.S. Army Forces in Korea, part 3, p. 18.
85. Kim, Cheju-do, p. 106.
86. FEC, History of U.S. Army Forces in Korea, part 3, p. 18.
87. Ibid., p. 18.

a thorough search for weapons, voters were allowed to enter the polling station, one or two at a time, to cast their ballots. A reserve force composed of as many as fifty protective association members, and from ten to twenty police and constabulary was usually stationed nearby “in obscure alleyways and buildings.”

All these precautions were needed on Cheju-do. Voting lists and ballot boxes were burned in guerrilla raids on government offices, and election officials attacked or kidnapped. Half of the election officials on the island resigned their posts, were kidnapped, or simply failed to show up to open the polls. The guerrillas cut telephone lines, destroyed bridges, and blocked roads with piles of stones to disrupt communications. Government officials were unable to transport ballots and voting boxes in many areas, and were forced to request army transportation from the Military Government company on the island. In all, “During election week, there were fifty assorted demonstrations, disorders, arson cases, and attacks on rightist’s offices and homes. Sixty-three towns were attacked, in addition to three government buildings. An equal number of Communists and rightists, fourteen, were also killed, as well as twenty members of rightist and police families.” Although fighting eased after May 10, “small, swiftly moving bands” of guerrillas continued to harass government forces and raid villages.

Atrocities were committed by both sides. The guerrillas as well as the government forces were often indiscriminate in their use of violence. “Stories were told of raided villages where there were found the bodies of hanged women, or women and children run through with spears. Tales of villages utterly wiped out kept coming in. Numbers of rightists and police were kidnapped, then hanged or beheaded.” These excesses seemed to cause some shift in public opinion on the island against the guerrillas. A Communist account admits that errors made by the guerrillas during this period were exploited by the government: “Sometimes the guerrillas committed mistakes in making reckless attacks in the anti-American struggle. For example, on April 3 the guerrillas killed farmers instead of taking policemen at Hallim, and in Kujwa district, the guerrillas who attacked in order to capture the head of the Kungmin Hoc, instead caused his father to commit suicide. The government side tried to use these mistakes to break up the peo-
people’s solidarity and disrupt the relations between the people and the guerrillas.  

Similar cases were almost certainly more common than the author of the above passage is willing to admit. Accurate casualty figures of any kind, however, are almost impossible to obtain for this period of the rebellion. The Military Government statistics quoted above are clearly inconsistent with “tales of villages utterly wiped out.” The government apparently either did not know in any detail what was happening in the large areas under guerrilla control, or chose to downplay the violence on the island. In either case, official figures probably underestimate the number of casualties on Cheju-do during this period.

A better indication of the seriousness of the situation was a message radioed to Seoul by the Military Governor of Cheju-do the day after the elections reporting that a “state of minor guerrilla warfare” existed on the island. The cable went on to request the immediate dispatch of two destroyers to isolate the island and fly-overs by fighter aircraft to intimidate the guerrillas. The U.S.S. Craig was diverted to Cheju-do the next day where it took up station off the northern coast to prevent infiltration of arms to the insurgents. Although it was “contemplated” that the requested forces would also be sent, there is no record that any were ever dispatched.

The guerrilla attacks did succeed in disrupting the elections on the island. Less than half the registered voters cast ballots in two of the three precincts, and no votes at all were cast at 20 percent of the polls. These figures were in sharp contrast to results elsewhere in the South where 90 percent of the voters participated. The Cheju-do elections were declared invalid by the Military Government in the two precincts where turnout fell below 50 percent. Although elections were first rescheduled for late June in these areas, they were later indefinitely postponed to avoid further bloodshed. The two Cheju-do seats in the National Assembly remained vacant for a year, finally being filled in the spring of 1949.

INITIAL OPERATIONS AGAINST THE GUERRILLAS AND THE AUGUST UNDERGROUND ELECTIONS

As the Military Government attempted to restore order after the May 10 elections, it quickly found that the doubtful loyalty of the constabulary force in the island presented it with a major problem. This was not a situation unique to Cheju-do, although it first surfaced there. There were several reasons for the widespread disaffection within the constabulary. The relationship between the constabulary and the police had always been strained. The police regarded themselves as the premier security force and considered the constabulary a rival, upstart group heavily infiltrated by leftists, that could not be depended upon. The police, dominated by collaborators who had acquired “prior experience” under the Japanese, was distinctly right wing in its ideological coloration. Its methods were those of the old school with little regard for civil rights and with frequent use of torture. Individuals often joined the constabulary to get even with the police, and battles between two groups occurred on several occasions. In the early days of the occupation, the absence of a program for screening constabulary recruits allowed many leftists into its ranks.

The constabulary force on Cheju-do was locally raised when the Ninth Regiment was organized in Mostup’o in the fall of 1946. Even though there was some rotation of personnel, the officers and men of the regiment had many ties with the islanders. Once the rebellion broke out, they tended to see it not as a struggle over the legitimacy of the South Korean government, but as a quarrel between the people of the island and the police. They did not want to become involved. As pressure mounted on the constabulary to take action against the rebels, therefore, a whole series of defections, assassinations, and other disturbances within the regiment developed. These incidents foreshadowed the trouble that was to erupt in the constabulary at Yŏsu in October, but the warning signals were not heeded by the Military Government.

The constabulary forces on Cheju-do were also heavily infiltrated by Communists. The head of the SKLP organization within the regiment was Lieutenant Mun Sang-gil. Mun, a former NCO in the Japanese Army, had served on the island as an enlisted man before graduating from the third class of the Korean Military Academy (which became notorious for its large number of Communist sympathizers). Many soldiers in the communications and intelligence sections of the regiment were also involved in SKLP activities. Major O Il-gyun, the commander of the battalion sent from Pusan to reinforce the regiment after the April 3 uprising, was also apparently a party member.

Trouble had been brewing inside the regiment for some time. Mun had made an unsuccessful attempt to kill the regimental com-

88. Kim, Cheju-do, p. 112.
89. FEC, Intelligence Summary, May 15, 1948.
90. Ibid., May 20, 1948.
manner in 1947 with poison. He also participated with the local SKLP leadership in drawing up the plans for the April 3 attacks. Once the rebellion had broken out, the SKLP made every effort to win the soldiers of the regiment over to its side. A Communist source describes the relationship between the guerrillas and the regiment as follows:

Lt. Mun Sang-gil and his company provided information to help make the guerrilla activities easier, and at the same time, they endeavored to protect the people's lives and property themselves. A united front was established therefore, between the people, the guerrillas, and the soldiers in the pacifying regiment. Almost daily, the soldiers received leaflets and appeals "not to support the American imperialists and their followers who are suppressing and killing your parents, wives, and brothers."  

Communist propaganda appealed to the constabulary to rise up against the government and police, "turning their guns on the American imperialists." Signboards dotted the gates of villages in areas controlled by the guerrillas welcoming the constabulary and urging them to support the people's struggle.

The initial response of the constabulary was to open secret talks with the guerrillas in an attempt to end the rebellion. This did not necessarily reflect any disloyalty on the part of the regimental commander, but probably stemmed from a realistic perception of the extent of popular support for the guerrillas, a genuine sympathy with many of their grievances, and an attempt to implement the traditional formula for settling rebellions on the island.

The first of these meetings, apparently arranged by SKLP members within the regiment, was held in late April, just before the elections. Regimental Commander Kim Ing-nyǒl, Major O Il-gyun, and the head of the intelligence section represented the constabulary, while Kim Tal-sam spoke for the rebels. Kim made a five-point demand calling for the surrender of all police, the confiscation of their weapons, punishment of police and rightists who had committed atrocities, withdrawal of rightist youth groups from the island, and assurances that the May 10 elections would be cancelled. These demands were rejected by the constabulary commander, who tried to persuade Kim to surrender by appealing to him as a fellow student draftee. The meeting ended inconclusively with neither side agreeing to the other's arguments.

93. Kongbi t'obǒlsa, p. 10.
95. Hanguk chǒnjangsa, p. 440.
97. Ibid., p. 440.
98. Ibid.

A second round of negotiations was apparently held after Colonel Pak Chin-gyǒng took over command of the regiment following General Dean's visit. Pak was reassigned from the personnel section of constabulary headquarters to head the regiment because he had served on Cheju-do while in the Japanese army and was familiar with its terrain and fortifications. Before his departure for the island, Pak was personally instructed by General Dean to settle the rebellion, using a minimum of force. It is unclear whether an actual face-to-face meeting occurred or negotiations were carried on through intermediaries. In either case, Pak's attempts to persuade the guerrillas to surrender were unsuccessful. Although the insurgents sought to string out negotiations by arranging subsequent meetings, Pak decided to break off contacts and begin operations against the guerrillas.

The first pacification campaign got under way in late May. The constabulary now took on the primary responsibility for conducting operations against the guerrillas on Halla mountain, releasing the police for stepped-up patrols in the coastal villages. Colonel Pak pursued a carefully developed three-phase strategy. The first step was to establish strategic hamlets by fortifying villages with high stone walls and training local militia forces. Security in the coastal areas was provided by the police, as the constabulary moved out of their bases to jumping-off points around Halla mountain. In the second phase, the constabulary aided by police and right-wing youth groups conducted massive sweeps of the interior of the island. Spotter planes were used to locate concentrations of guerrillas as government forces combed the slopes of the mountain fifty yards apart. Mountain villages were burned and their residents forcibly relocated to coastal refugee camps. In the final phase of the operation, screening centers were set up in the camps to weed out suspected guerrillas. According to an American visitor, the most striking feature of the camps was the youth of their prisoners. It was "not uncommon to find ten- and twelve-year-old boys" in the relocation centers since the constabulary indiscriminately picked up every youth they found in the highlands as a suspected Communist. Over 600 alleged members of the SKLP were imprisoned over the summer as a result of these operations.

Before the full impact of these tactics could be felt, however, Colonel Pak was assassinated. After returning from a party to celebrate
his promotion to full colonel late in the night of June 18, Pak was shot to death in his sleep. The assassination made the front pages of the Seoul newspapers, and an intense investigation was launched to find his killers. The inquiry uncovered the activities of Mun Sang-gil and a few other Communists, but did not disclose the full extent of SKLP penetration of the regiment. Ch'oe Kyông-nok was appointed to replace Pak, with Song Yo-ch' an as his executive officer. Although limited operations against the guerrillas were continued through the middle of July, the main effort was now to stabilize the situation inside the regiment.100

Guerrilla attacks also slackened off toward the end of June. The pressure of the government operations had temporarily forced them on the defensive, and the arrival of the summer monsoon rains was also said to have "dampened the ardor of the rebels."101 But the main reasons for lessened activity had to do with developments within the SKLP. For much of the summer, the party was preoccupied with the twin tasks of internal reorganization and preparations for the "August 25 underground elections." The SKLP carried out a major shake-up of its organization on the mainland, and possibly on Cheju-do, over the summer. The leadership of the party was apparently dissatisfied with the performance of local committees in the campaign against the May 10 elections. Attributing the poor results to having left the implementation of directives to the initiative of lower levels of the party, the SKLP transferred many cadres and moved toward greater centralization of its organization. Guerrilla "flying columns" were also organized and began training in remote areas of the mainland to provide the SKLP with the military capability that it had lacked in the campaign against the elections.102

A period of relative quiet was also needed to organize southern participation in the August elections to establish the DPRK. This new concern was reflected in Radio P'yôngyang broadcasts stressing the achievements of "democratic construction" in the North and preparations for the establishment of a Supreme People's Assembly. Elections on August 25 were to choose 210 northern representatives. The 360 seats reserved for the South in the legislative body, however, were to be filled in a more complicated two-stage process.

100. For an account of the impact of Pak's assassination and Yôsu on public confidence in the constabulary, Kukche Simmun, Nov. 9, 1948; Hanguk chônaengsa, p. 441.


The process began with a signature-gathering campaign to support "all-country elections."103 The campaign opened in July since considerable time was needed to circulate petitions and transport them to the North. Five to seven delegates from each county in the South were designated to attend a conference of "representatives of the South Korean people" in Haeju, the North Korean town just across the parallel where the SKLP headquarters was located. Persons who signed the petitions did not vote for specific delegates, since it was impossible to know in advance who would make it to the North. What they participated in was more in the nature of a referendum supporting the establishment of the DPRK. As it turned out, almost 90 percent of the delegates succeeded in attending the conference, which convened on August 20, five days before the northern elections, to choose representatives from the South.104

Subsequent North Korean claims that "underground elections" were held in the South have usually been greeted with extreme skepticism, if not dismissed as outright lies. There is overwhelming evidence from American sources, however, to indicate that the SKLP made a major effort to get out the vote in the South to demonstrate support for the DPRK.105 The North's claim of having achieved a 77 percent participation rate in elections in the South is certainly a gross exaggeration.106 Nevertheless, U.S. intelligence reports do suggest that nearly 25 percent of the rural population may have voted. Of these, 5 percent were said to have cast their ballots "knowingly" for the establishment of a rival government in the North, while the remainder voted for "something"—whether it was for land reform, unification, or just from fear of guerrillas. Communist accounts claim an 85 percent turnout on Cheju-do.107 Whatever the actual figure, both the over-all level of participation and the number of "knowing" votes cast were presumably higher than on the mainland.

103. For details on the organization of the elections see FEC, Intelligence Summary, Aug. 13, 14, 15, 24, 25, 27, and Sept. 14, 15.

104. Interview with Kim Nam-sik, Seoul, May 25, 1978. The border remained relatively open until the spring of 1949, so this high figure is not surprising.

105. See, for example, Scalapino and Lee, Communism in Korea, p. 373. The following discussion is based on a Department of the Army message dated Sept. 10, 1948, asking General Hodge a series of questions on the elections, and his response dated Sept. 30, 1948. SCAP Adjutant General's File, Records Group 331, National Archives.


Normal electoral procedures, needless to say, were not always followed. The order of priorities in the election was revealed in a captured SKLP directive that read, "Every effort must be made to obtain a large number of supporters for the election. Signing ballots on behalf of voters is authorized. Such action, however, will be recognized only in areas where police suppression is so great as to prevent normal voting."  

One sampling of captured ballots from an area near Seoul prompted General Hodge to remark that "the vote-manufacturers had succumbed to the comedy of their task." Included in the names on the petitions were the forged signatures of rightist politicians, newspapermen, government officials, assemblymen, the title of a novel, and common last names followed by the Chinese characters for spring, summer, autumn, and fall, or near, far, and distant. Still, the SKLP tried to play it straight. An August 20 directive warned, "There is a tendency toward the use of illegal methods in executing the election. This will cease immediately. At least, the voters must themselves sign the ballot."  

The date of the directive suggests that the signature drive continued for several weeks after the Haeju conference. While fraud was widespread, it was probably less prevalent in outlying areas where the SKLP could operate with greater freedom. The signature-gathering campaign, moreover, was conducted in an extremely hostile environment in which government seizure of many of the petitions could be expected. More than 100,000 ballots, each with space for ten signatures, seals, or fingerprints, were confiscated by South Korean authorities. In these circumstances, it is not surprising that many persons, voting perhaps under pressure, would be reluctant to sign their real names.  

In marked contrast to the Pyŏngyang Conference five months earlier, the situation on Cheju-do was much discussed at the Haeju meeting. Kim Tal-sam, Kang Ki-ch' an, and four other leaders of the SKLP on Cheju-do managed to slip off the island and make their way to the conference. Although Kim is said to have bragged that the delegates were transported by Soviet submarine, this is far from certain. Kim did make a special report to the conference on partisan operations on Cheju-do that was received with "thunderous applause." The speech reportedly focused narrowly on the details of military operations without clarifying the relationship of armed struggle there to over-all unification strategy. The presence of Kim and other leaders at the conference was another factor in the lull in fighting on the island.  

THE YŐSU REBELLION AND THE FALL SUPPRESSION CAMPAIGN  

Guerrilla activity began to pick up after the August elections. Two policemen were killed and five wounded in late August in a brief flurry of guerrilla attacks. These incidents should have served as a warning, but the situation was considered well enough in hand for the government to begin winding down its operations against the guerrillas. The mainland police that had been sent to the island after Dean's visit were withdrawn in early September. The constabulary forces also ended their operations to resume training interrupted by the rebellion. The SKLP benefited, moreover, from the decision of a new police chief to release 800 detainees suspected of Communist sympathies. Kim Tal-sam may also have returned to the island sometime during this period. As a result, the rebellion gradually began to re-establish itself. In the latter half of September, 15 persons were killed in guerrilla attacks on police boxes and villages, as the SKLP sought to demonstrate its strength and recapture lost prestige.  

Fighting intensified when seven more policemen were killed in October in a series of guerrilla raids on villages along the coast. As the attacks continued, constabulary forces were again committed to counterguerrilla operations. The situation was serious enough for a Cheju field command to be established on October 11 to direct action against the guerrillas. Plans were also made to reinforce the regiment already on the island by dispatching an additional battalion from the Fourteenth Regiment stationed at the nearby mainland port of Yŏsu. But as the first elements of the battalion were embarking from the Yŏsu docks on October 20, the entire regiment rose up in rebellion.  

A statement by the "Soldiers' Committee," published in the Yŏsu People's Daily while the city was under rebel control, explained the reasons for the rebellion. An American intelligence report paraphrased the declaration as follows:  

The committee stated that its aim was to protect the country against foreign imperialism and accused President Rhee Syngman and Prime Minister Lee Bum-sok of selling their country by forming a separate Government. The people of Cheju island began a fight against imperialist policy in April, according to the committee, and are dedicating their lives to the defense of their fatherland. The committee  

109. Ibid.  
111. Sasaki, Hangukhǒn pisa, p. 280, quoting Ko Chun-sŏk, who attended the conference.  
112. FEC, History of U.S. Army Forces in Korea, part 3, pp. 18-19; notes on the rebellion provided by Gregory Henderson.  
claimed that the soldiers in Yŏsu refused to murder the people of Cheju and would not agree to as to be sent to the island. According to the committee, the revolt was an uprising designed to establish the participants as the "real Korean People's Army" and to obtain the real independence of Korea. 114

While this seems straightforward enough, the question of the causes of the rebellion has never really been answered.

Various interpretations of the Yŏsu incident have been offered, each implying a different relationship with the Cheju-do rebellion. The majority opinion, held by American military advisors on the scene, is that a rebellion planned for later in the year was touched off prematurely by the unexpected order to move to Cheju-do. Another view, found in some South Korean accounts, maintains that the rebellion was designed as a second front by the SKLP to take some of the pressure off the Cheju-do guerrillas. A third set of explanations, focusing more on political factors, sees the rebellion as one of a series of uprisings designed to test American reaction, and to undercut the legitimacy of the newly established South Korean government. 115

114. FEC, Intelligence Summary, Nov. 17, 1948.
115. Robert K. Sawyer, Military Advisors in Korea: KMAIG in Peace and War (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1962), p. 39. Kongoi yŏnhyang, pp. 202, 218, for example. For reports on the tie-in with the United Nations debate, see FEC, Intelligence Summary, Oct. 29, 1948. There is also an intriguing, but unconfirmed story that Radio P'yŏngyang knew of the rebellion beforehand and broke the news prematurely. On Oct. 17, Izvestia carried a report, based on a Radio P'yŏngyang broadcast, that a military uprising had occurred at Taegu. Reacting to the report, which was also picked up by Tass, an Associated Press dispatch from Seoul on Oct. 18 repeated official American denials and speculated that "The Moscow report of the so-called rebellion against the puppet government of South Korea' may be part of a general campaign to spread the appearance of South Korean dissatisfaction with the government." See also John W. Washburn, "The Soviet Press Views North Korea," Pacific Affairs, March 1949, p. 58. It is doubtful that these reports prove either Soviet or North Korean involvement in the rebellion. They were never exploited by the South Korean and American authorities to make this point, as one would expect if they had any substance. It was also no secret that dissatisfaction was widespread in the constabulary among both leftist and rightist opponents of Rhee. A purge of the security forces, in fact, had just gotten underway in the wake of an unsuccessful attempt to assassinate the president on Oct. 18, and the uncovering of a right-wing plot to stage a coup earlier in the month. FEC, Intelligence Summary, Oct. 21, 22, 1948.

A later report of an intercepted message from the DPRK to the pro-Communist League of Korean Residents in Japan, evaluated as "possibly true," stated that the Yŏsu rebellion was carried out "strictly on orders from Moscow and mainly as a test to determine what action the South Korean government would take in order to quell the uprising and to what extent the American occupation forces would take part." It was anticipated, the message continued, that U.S. forces would hesitate to become involved and that other, localized uprisings would be staged depending on the results. CG, USAF, "Weekly Report," Nov. 19, 1948.


precarious for several weeks. No one was sure whether the rebellion was part of a wider series of planned uprisings or whether it would spread to other constabulary elements. Incidents that occurred elsewhere increased public doubts about the reliability of the constabulary. It also appeared that the United States, under pressure from a Soviet announcement that they would withdraw at the end of the year, might also pull its forces out of the ROK, leaving the country to face its fate alone. Intelligence estimates of the "prospects for the survival of the ROK," itself a telling title, forecast a bleak future without substantial inputs of American economic and military aid.\(^{118}\)

Over the long run, however, the results of the rebellion for the government were not all negative. It upset SKLP plans for coordinated uprisings in the military. By revealing the extent of Communist penetration, it also provided Rhee with both warning and a justification for a widespread purge of the constabulary to assure its loyalty. If Yŏsu was a test, it was one that was successfully passed. After an initial period of anxiety, a renewal of self-confidence followed that soon puffed out into the bravado that characterized Rhee's calls for a "March North" the following spring. The rebellion, moreover, had a major impact on the conduct of counterguerrilla operations on Cheju-do. Anti-Communist attitudes hardened as government losses in battles with the mainland guerrillas increased. Cheju-do also became a much more pressing problem for the government's legitimacy. Once the Yŏsu uprising had been dealt with, suppression of the Cheju insurgency was next on the list. And now the government was unrestrained in its operations against the Cheju-do guerrillas.

The immediate effect of the Yŏsu rebellion on Cheju-do, however, was to greatly encourage the guerrillas. Four days after its outbreak, Yi Tok-ku, a member of the SKLP's military committee on the island, issued a declaration of war on the government. The statement, which appeared in a clandestine issue of the Cheju Press put out by the SKLP, appealed to the island's soldiers to follow the example of the Fourteenth Regiment and join the guerrillas:

> Dear soldiers and policemen, look at your rifles and see where they come from. Those guns were bought with our taxes. Don't shoot your parents and brothers, but protect them. Return your guns to their real owners. The people of Cheju-do trust that you won't sacrifice your own flesh and blood.

control. The guerrillas were now forced to regroup into several large roving bands to forage for food and recruit replacements in raids on villages. Since food supplies were already running low, opinion in many coastal villages began to turn against the insurgents. Whether for this reason or through intimidation, the constabulary was now able to mobilize large numbers of villagers in self-defense forces to support its drive against the guerrillas.\(^{123}\)

Added impetus was given to these operations by the scheduled rotation of the Ninth Regiment back to the mainland at the end of the year. At the beginning of December, the leaders of the regiment decided to make a final push to try to clear the island of guerrillas before they left and to "make a mark" for their replacements to match.\(^{124}\) Many innocent persons were killed during this period. The slaughter reached its peak in mid-December when 630 persons were killed in a single week. The disproportion between guerrilla casualties and constabulary losses, as well as the limited number of weapons captured, indicates that a tremendous amount of over-kill was involved. Both South Korean and Communist sources agree that no more than 300 main force guerrillas remained at this time.\(^{125}\)

**THE GUERRILLAS' NEW YEAR OFFENSIVE**

The Second Regiment arrived on Cheju-do on December 29 to relieve the constabulary troops on the island. The confusion surrounding the rotation of the constabulary units provided the guerrillas with a last opportunity to launch an offensive. The attacks began with an assault on a constabulary battalion stationed at Odong-ni on the evening of January 1. The guerrillas were driven off in an hour of fierce fighting in the darkness and sleetting rain in which 20 attackers and 7 soldiers were killed. Guerrilla raids over the next few days left 56 villagers dead. The most serious incident occurred on January 3 when a force of 200 guerrillas attacked the outskirts of Cheju city. The city hall was completely gutted and all its records destroyed in a fire set to coincide with the attack. Guerrillas also attacked a police substation at Samyang and burned it to the ground.\(^{126}\)

The guerrilla offensive caused a brief panic on the island. The Cheju-do command reported that Soviet submarines had been sighted off the coast flashing a signal to the guerrillas "who immediately attacked the city." The vessels were seen elsewhere during the day, according to the South Korean press, with their flag "clearly visible from the shore." Coast Guard ships gave chase, but were reportedly unable to intercept the submarines due to high seas. The new constabulary commander protested to Seoul that the decision to lift the state of emergency, declared after Yŏn, would severely hamper operations against the guerrillas. As a result, martial law was continued on the island for a month more.\(^{127}\)

The Second Regiment counterattacked on January 4, assisted by air and naval support. Korean army observation planes dropped leaflets and buzzed Halla-san, while naval vessels provided fire support "to intimidate the rebels." Since the operations were conducted mainly along the shore, where the villages were already under government control, their only effect was to drive 15,000 persons inland to guerrilla base areas to escape the shelling.\(^{128}\)

Having inadvertently caused thousands of villagers to flee, the constabulary now had to try to convince them to come down from the mountain. Mass meetings were organized to appeal to the villagers.

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123. For example, on Dec. 7 the constabulary supported by 3,000 civilians staged simultaneous operations near Moulp'o, Sŏgwip'o, Namwŏn-ni, and Hallasan, in which 105 "guerrillas" were killed. USAFIK, *G-2 Periodic Report*, Dec. 16, 1948.


125. According to South Korean press reports of this period, there were only "60 armed insurgents" left, *Kukche Simmun*, Dec. 9, 1948, quoting the minister of national defense. According to *Hanguk chŏnjaeng-sa*, this was an underestimate, and as many as "a battalion" remained, p. 445, Kim, *Cheju-do*, p. 173, states the number of guerrillas had declined to only about 300.


127. USAFIK, *G-2 Periodic Report*, Jan. 5, 1949. The reports of Soviet submarines operating off the island provoked a sharp reaction from both the North Koreans and the Russians. A Radio P'yŏngyang broadcast of Jan. 9, 1949, quoted a denial appearing in the Soviet service paper *Red Fleet* and went on to charge that the allegations were "a vicious scheme of the South Korean puppet government to hide its character by blaming a certain foreign power for aiding and instigating the South Korean people's national salvation struggle . . . prolonging the occupation by the U.S. Army." Similar reports were also played up by the South at the time of President Rhee's visit to the island in early April. None was ever confirmed. A USAFIK report, quoted in the FEC, *Intelligence Summary* of April 7, 1949, stated flatly that there was no substance to the reports: "Although rumors indicate that rebel forces have received logistic support by water from the mainland and North Korea, there is no evidence to substantiate the report. Constant patrolling by ships of the Korean Navy, aerial reconnaissance flights, and a tight ring of police around the villages on the coastal plain reduce the possibility of outside support." The guerrillas were able to maintain some liaison with the mainland by using fishing boats, but it is doubtful that submarines were ever involved. USAFIK, *G-2 Periodic Report*, Jan. 5, 1949. See also fn. 111 and related text.

and to denounce the guerrillas. The soldiers put on weapons displays and shows of their firepower to attempt to intimidate the guerrillas into surrendering. According to South Korean sources, some efforts at rebuilding and relief work were also started.\(^{129}\)

The government pursued a much more brutal policy in the interior of the island. Two documented cases of atrocities committed by the security forces came to light during this period. On January 25, American advisors discovered the bodies of ninety-seven men, women, and children at Ora-ri, just outside Cheju city. The victims had been shot four or five times with M-1 carbines, whose spent cartridges littered the area. Although both the constabulary and police denied involvement, they were primarily armed with this weapon and it is inconceivable that the guerrillas would have wasted scarce ammunition in such a manner. The second incident was witnessed by four American advisors at Todor-ri on February 20. The advisors stumbled across a mass execution of seventy-six villagers by right-wing youth group members with bamboo spears, supervised by South Korean police. Five women and “numerous children of middle-school age” were among the victims. The advisors reported that they were unable to halt the massacre, which was already half completed when they arrived on the scene. There is no indication, however, that any subsequent action was ever undertaken to investigate the incident and punish those responsible.\(^{130}\)

A long broadcast on Radio P'yŏngyang on February 1 described the increase in fighting on the island as follows:

The people's armed guerrillas are launching activities more vigorously than ever before on Cheju island. According to reliable information reaching P'yŏngyang recently, severe fighting flared up on January 16 and 17 preceded by an attack launched by the guerrillas in the Pyoson area. On January 12 and 13 the guerrillas enticed into the mountains a combined force of police, troops, and Volunteer Corps members on an expeditionary mission, and encircled, and attacked them. Meanwhile, guerrillas in the vicinity of Chung myun succeeded in decoying a combined force of police and Min Bo Dan [Civilian Guard Corps], and after encircling them, launched a severe attack at dawn on January 17. On January 16 a police unit went out on an expeditionary mission in the mountains in the township of Taechong, and was routed by the armed guerrillas who ambushed it. Meanwhile, on January 16, armed guerrillas appeared in the vicinity of Moṣil-p'o and liquidated a number of vicious government officials and terrorists, while another unit attacked and destroyed the guard post at Pyosan-nil on January 24. On January 21 an armed guerrilla unit attacked Kakhchi-nil, Aewol township, and liquidated four vicious landlords and five members of a terrorist gang in the village. In the ensuing battle, they repulsed the police after capturing three prisoners and wounding nine. Simultaneously, the offices of the Taedong Youth Association and the Min Bo Dan were reduced to ashes. According to the same information, another guerrilla unit the same day appeared in Hagwi-nil, Aewol township, and liquidated several vicious elements. Acting in concert with the guerrillas, the inhabitants of the villages burned the offices of the South Korean Democratic party. Flurried at this situation, the police are said to have run away abandoning their arms.\(^{131}\)

While not all the place names mentioned in the report can be located in gazetteers, the over-all pattern of incidents is not inconsistent with the descriptions of American sources. The success of the guerrillas, the strength of popular support, and the low morale of the security forces are certainly exaggerated. Many of the details of the fighting also appear to be filled in. Yet, in general, the North appears to have been well informed about developments on Cheju-do during this period. By the spring, this situation had changed. Radio P'yŏngyang now began to preface its stories on the island with the surprisingly candid admission that they were based on “fragmentary reports.”\(^{132}\) The change reflected the worsening position of the guerrillas.

Despite mounting losses, the guerrillas continued their sporadic attacks. The government troops often left themselves open to ambush by failing to take adequate precautions. On February 4, for example, a truck convoy returning exchanged Japanese rifles was attacked near Kûmyŏng. More than a hundred rifles were lost and seventeen soldiers killed. According to an American report, “Losses among the armed forces have been relatively heavy, considering the minor inroads they have made on guerrilla concentrations to date. However, many of the army casualties can be attributed to the failure to follow the tactical suggestions of U.S. advisors, particularly with regard to march security.”\(^{133}\) Government casualties continued to climb. During the first week in March, twenty-eight soldiers were killed.\(^{134}\) The guerrillas had been contained but not defeated. The situation on the island seemed to be developing into a standoff.

RHEE'S VISIT AND THE FINAL SUPPRESSION CAMPAIGN

By the spring of 1949, the remarkable persistence of the guerrilla movement on Cheju-do had become a major embarrassment to the ROK. Determined to bring the rebellion to an end, the South Korean cabinet made a series of decisions concerning the island. A special combat command, headed by Colonel Yu Chae-hŭng, was established

129. Ibid., pp. 445-46.
132. Ibid., April 3 and July 11, 1949.
134. FEC, Intelligence Summary, March 25, 1949. Guerrilla losses were 183 killed over the same period.
on March 2, and additional troops sent to Cheju-do. Cabinet members and personal representatives of the president shuttled back and forth to supervise the progress of the spring offensive designed to clear the island of guerrillas. At the same time, a public relations effort was launched to present the government's version of the rebellion. The climax of all this activity was a visit by Syngman Rhee in early April to demonstrate the restoration of government control on the first anniversary of the uprising. The final act closing the books on the rebellion was the holding of elections on May 10 to fill the two vacant Cheju seats in the National Assembly.

To prepare public opinion for conditions on the island and to put forward the government's version of events, a delegation of army, police, and civilian organizations on Cheju-do made the rounds in Seoul during the first two weeks in March. The group called on Dr. Arthur Bunce, the head of the Economic Cooperation Administration, to appeal for relief supplies and reconstruction aid. It also met with national assemblymen and held a series of news conferences with reporters. It was only as this public relations campaign unfolded that the full dimensions of the devastation on the island became known. Fifteen thousand persons had been "killed by the Communists." Three quarters of the 400 villages on Cheju-do had been ravaged, and more than 20,000 houses burned down. Thirty-four schools and fourteen town offices had also been destroyed. Nearly a third of the population was concentrated in Cheju city, where 65,000 displaced persons were in immediate need of food and shelter. The food situation was becoming critical. Heavy fighting had prevented the harvesting of the island's sweet potato crop, which had been allowed to rot underground; and autumn barley had not yet been sown. To avert widespread starvation, 300,000 bushels of relief grain were needed by the end of May.

Rhee also sent several high-ranking officials to the island as his personal representatives to supervise operations against guerrillas. The first to arrive in early March were Yi P'o-m-sok, premier and minister of defense, and Shin Sŏng-mo, minister of home affairs. When the two returned to Seoul in the middle of the month, Lee held a press conference at which he admitted that "not a few mistakes" had been made by the government on the island. Ignoring the fact that the most serious fighting had occurred after Yŏsu, the premier attributed these mistakes on Cheju-do to the policy of "solving the situation by force adopted by the Military Government." He also went on to promise that in the future the government would pursue a strategy of "half-force, half-administration" in dealing with the rebellion. Rear Admiral Son Wŏn-il was sent to Cheju-do on March 17 to oversee the implementation of the new policy and to make final preparations for Rhee's visit in April.

Colonel Yu Chae-hông, a former member of the Japanese military and executive officer of the Korean Military Academy, was appointed head of the new Cheju-do task force in early March with "orders to clean up the estimated 500 remaining guerrillas by April." The forces under his command included the Second Constabulary Regiment, island police, village protection forces, and rightist youth. These were reinforced by a separate ranger battalion, railroad police detachments, and elements from the S. Ch'ungch'ŏng Province police. Paramilitary forces were also mobilized to assist in the offensive against the guerrillas. Teachers, government clerks, and youth group members were put through crash military training courses, and integrated into task force units.

The first step in the operation was to move the government forces out of the coastal villages in extended operations against the guerrillas on Halla mountain. Colonel Yu also inaugurated an amnesty program to induce surrenders, calling "a halt to the indiscriminate slaying of residents of the hill country villages." Yu set a cut-off date of March 25 for the amnesty program, warning that the government would then launch an all-out campaign to wipe out the remaining guerrillas. The amnesty program achieved considerable success with over one hundred persons a day surrendering while it was in effect.

When the deadline passed, the task force began a final drive to clear the island of guerrillas. Although the offensive was relatively short, it was probably the bloodiest period of the rebellion. According to figures supplied to the United Nations Commission, there were 2,345 rebel casualties and 1,668 civilian losses from the start of the task force's operation in early March to its conclusion on April 12.

135. Seoul Sîmnûn, March 15, 1949. Lee apparently got his lines confused, however, when he brushed aside questions on the need for relief efforts, stating that the islanders were "so self-reliant" that they didn't need any aid, that grain captured from the guerrillas was being turned over to them in any case, and that the "real question" was how to supply the government forces on the island. USAFIK, G-2 Periodic Report, March 23, 1949.

surrendering during this period were 3,600 guerrilla sympathizers. These figures need to be put in perspective. Many of the civilian losses were probably noncombatant residents of the interior killed as a result of government action. It is obvious, too, that many of the “guerrilla” casualties should probably be placed in the civilian category. Since nearly all of the guerrilla casualties and most of the civilian losses can be assumed to have been deaths, the intensity of violence during this period must have been very great. Though an average of one hundred persons a day were killed over the entire period, the daily figures were probably much lower while the amnesty program was in effect, and much higher after the start of the offensive on March 25. The only period of the rebellion that approached this in terms of its slaughter was that of the Ninth Regiment’s final operations in December 1948.

The combined pressure of the amnesty program and task force operations destroyed the popular base of the guerrillas, as the interior of the island was depopulated. The guerrillas also began to face increasingly severe logistical problems. South Korean forces discovered several arms caches. According to a ROK account, the capture of the largest of these stockpiles yielded over three hundred rifles and several thousand rounds of ammunition. Because of these losses, the guerrilla’s supply situation was becoming critical:

The lack of ammunition is the most pressing problem the guerrillas have at present. Captured and foraged food stocks are ample, and caves left behind by the Japanese make security and housing no great problem. However, there is no ready source of ammunition. The rebels are believed to have less than 1,500 rounds of U.S. ammunition and their only source of supply for U.S. type weapons is stocks seized from the Republic’s armed forces. Also, they may have sufficient supplies to reload 2,000 rounds of ammunition for Japanese rifles.

Also important in these weapons losses was the increasing amount of information available from interrogation of prisoners and defectors as the government forces closed in on the guerrillas.

Attrition also began to take a serious toll of the SKLP leadership. Kim Min-sông, the chief of the organization bureau of the party, was captured and beheaded. His head was then put on display in Sŏgwip’o “to show the people what the end of a rebel was like.” Kim Yong-gwan, the head of the SKLP on the island, and three other leaders were also killed in a raid on party headquarters on April 20. At about this time, Kim Tal-sam turned over command of the remaining guerrillas to Yi Tŏk-ku and again slipped off the island. Incredibly, he made his way to the North and led a large group of guerrillas trained at the Kangdong Political Institute into the South in August. Kim’s group operated up and down the Taebaek mountain range on the east coast for the next six months before being forced to fall back across the parallel under heavy South Korean pressure in March 1950. Reorganized as the “766 unit,” Kim’s guerrilla force landed on the East coast when the Korean war broke out. Kim himself was reported killed in a subsequent attempt to infiltrate by sea into the Pusan area.

Fewer than 100 guerrillas remained after the government’s suppression campaign ended in mid-April. They were forced to stay continually on the move to avoid being wiped out by the security forces. Yi Tŏk-ku, the last of the original leaders of the rebellion, was killed in a police attack on June 7. His body was hung on a cross and mutilated with bamboo spears in front of the administration building in Cheju city. The command of the remaining guerrillas now passed to two defectors who had joined it from the Ninth Regiment. Two organizers were sent to Cheju-do by the SKLP in late June, but they concluded that the guerrillas were too weak and had too little popular support to undertake further offensive action.

On April 9, President Rhee flew to Cheju-do. According to a press spokesman, the visit had two purposes: Rhee wanted to “view the mop-up personally” and to “express his personal thanks [to the people of the island] for their firm, loyal stand against subversive elements, and his sympathy for their sufferings.” Rhee addressed a large crowd in the Cheju city square and later visited a nearby refugee camp. At the latter stop, he exhorted some 2,500 “captured, anti-Communist guerrillas” [sic] to “forget the past and become loyal citizens of the Republic.” When he returned to the mainland, Rhee made a week’s swing through the southern provinces of the ROK, delivering twenty speeches to a combined audience of over a million persons.

The presidential tour picked up wide coverage in the domestic

143. Hanguk chŏnjaen-sa, p. 447; Kim, Cheju-do, pp. 235-36; Kongbi t’ohōl-sa, pp. 8-9. Hanguk chŏnjaen-sa, however, suggests that Kim left the island at the time of the rotation of the Ninth Regiment in December, p. 445.


145. Hanguk chŏnjaen-sa, p. 447. A photograph of Yi’s body appears on p. 238 of Kim, Cheju-do; also see Kim, p. 239.

146. New York Times, April 10 (p. 10), and April 12, 1949; FEC, Intelligence Summary, May 9, 1949.
and international press. With it, according to General W. R. Roberts, Rhee hit a "public relations home run." The visit demonstrated restoration of government control and suppression of the rebellion. The adverse public reaction that might have developed when conditions on the island became known never materialized. Rhee was able to put across the government's version of events in a highly effective way. The human interest angle of stories filed from the island tended to focus on the personality of Rhee and the hardships inflicted on the population of the island by the Communist-inspired rebellion; little was said about the indiscriminate and excessive use of force by the government in its suppression. Against this publicity, the best that the North could do was to mark the anniversary of the April 3 uprising and to try to assess its "significance." Understandably, Radio P'yŏngyang's claim that the rebellion was the "forerunner" of a larger scale guerrilla struggle on the mainland and a "continuing beacon" for the people's resistance had a distant and hollow ring to it.

In another symbolic action, elections for the two vacant Cheju seats in the National Assembly were held on May 10, 1949. The balloting was observed by the United Nations commission, which rescheduled a previously postponed visit to the island at the invitation of the Korean government. Much in contrast to the year before, the elections were "marked by [their] quietness." Although an impressive 96 percent of those eligible participated, the absolute number of persons voting was small. In election district "B," one of the two on the island, only 5,766 persons cast ballots. The low number of voters in absolute terms probably reflected a decrease in the population of the island due to the rebellion, the incarceration of many suspected guerrillas, and the suspension of civil rights of other Communist sympathizers.

The members of the United Nations Commission traveled widely on the island, but always accompanied by guards and on a prearranged route. In its report, the commission stated that it was impressed by the friendliness of the people, the absence of disturbances, and the extent of destruction on the island. The key paragraph from Seoul's standpoint was the conclusion that "The observation group verified that peace and order had been restored in the disturbed areas and that life in the villages and towns had returned to normal. The small number


of rebels still hiding in the mountains constitutes no immediate and serious menace to the security of the province and no challenge to governmental authority." In light of the improved security situation, the Cheju-do combat command was abolished on May 15, and all but a battalion of troops withdrawn from the island.

Although the rebellion was now officially at an end, a few words remain to be said about its aftermath. Trials for "unrepentant Communists" involved in the uprising were held in early July. Sentences ranging from seven years imprisonment to life were handed out to 1,650 persons; 350 were sentenced to death, and 250 of these executed in October after a personal review of their sentences by Rhee. Many of those sentenced to prison terms were sent to jails on the mainland where they continued Communist activities. On September 14, a group of 440 prisoners, the majority of whom were from the island, staged a mass breakout at Mokp'o prison. Several guards were killed in the escape; as were most of the escapees over the next few days. In a particularly gruesome act of revenge, scores of captured prisoners were executed by the police and their bodies dumped at the doorsteps of prominent citizens of the town as a warning by police in the so-called "human flesh distribution incident." Many more inmates from the island were among the thousands of Communists killed by the authorities in the first weeks of the Korean War when it appeared they might be freed by advancing North Korean forces.

During the war, guerrilla activity flared up again on Cheju-do. There were many months where no one ventured abroad on the island after dark, and government control was limited to the major towns. Several hundred still active guerrillas attacked the island's broadcasting station and the Sŏgwi-p'o power plant as late as the autumn of 1952. Special counterinsurgency forces were again sent to Cheju-do. By the end of 1953, they had finally succeeded in destroying the last remnants of the guerrillas.

CONCLUSION

Having examined the background and traced the course of the

150. Report of United Nations Commission on Korea, p. 29. The paragraph also applied to South Ch'ŏlla Province, which the commission also visited.
rebellion, it is now necessary to consider several broader questions of interpretation. What was the balance of spontaneity and organization in the uprising? Why was it so bloody? Can Cheju-do be considered a lesson in how to fight a Communist insurgency? How was the 1948 rebellion different from traditional peasant uprisings on the island? What was the significance of the rebellion? No claim is made either for the exhaustiveness of this list, or for the definitiveness of the responses suggested below. Undoubtedly, both will have to be modified as more information becomes available. But the rebellion is so little studied and the issues it raises so important that tentative answers must at least be ventured.

With regard to the first question, the overwhelming weight of the evidence indicates that a major rebellion was not originally planned by the SKLP. The February resistance movement, though employing some violence, was essentially an effort to influence the United Nations commission, not a call for armed struggle against the Military Government. The April 5 attacks were limited in scope and may even have been a belated attempt to implement the February campaign, which never got off the ground on Cheju-do. The uprising was, in any case, inconvenient from the standpoint of SKLP strategy, which aimed at building a united front with southern opponents of Rhee at the P’yŏngyang Conference. Once the rebellion had broken out, the pent-up grievances of the islanders, special local conditions, and the intensely politicized atmosphere surrounding the May 10 elections pushed it out of control. After a lull in the summer as the SKLP attempted to conduct the “August underground election,” fighting again flared up in the fall. The attention that Cheju-do received at the Hageju Conference indicated that the character of the rebellion had now changed. Both sides recognized that the issue was the legitimacy of the two Korean states. Still, it was only after the Yŏnsu uprising that the SKLP line shifted to armed guerrilla struggle. South Korean charges that the rebellion was designed to embarrass the ROK and divert troops from the mainland properly apply to this phase. The New Year’s offensive and the attention that the rebellion received on Radio P’yŏngyang also indicated that North Korean policy was now to keep the rebellion going as long as possible to discredit the ROK. The intense pressure to clean up the rebels before the Rhee visit suggested that the symbolism of the insurgency was not lost on the South Korean government. In short, what started out as a spontaneous popular uprising gradually took on the character of an organized partisan movement as the competition between the two Korean states developed into a head-to-head confrontation.

Although accurate casualty figures are impossible to obtain, at least 30,000 persons, about 10 percent of the island’s population, were probably killed in the rebellion. While the guerrillas were responsible for many atrocities, especially in the early phases of the uprising, most of the casualties were inflicted by government forces during their pacification drives in the fall and spring. There are several reasons why the suppression of the rebellion was so bloody. Retaliation for guerrilla massacres, the leftist reputation of the island, and grudges carried over from the mainland were one set of factors. The Military Government’s use of right-wing youth groups that employed terroristic methods and were only loosely controlled was another. A Vietnamese-like syndrome in which commanders competed to accumulate impressive statistics on casualties inflicted on the guerrillas also contributed to the heavy death toll. Intense political pressure to clean up the rebellion and the tactics of area clearance used by the government forces, moreover, tended to blur the distinction between civilians and guerrillas. Most important, the isolation of the island allowed the security forces to operate with a free hand, without fear of public opinion. The unconcern with which whole villages were wiped out on the island contrasts sharply with the way in which similar incidents were handled on the mainland to minimize their adverse political impact.155

The suppression of the rebellion cannot be considered a success story on how to defeat a Communist insurgency. All the advantages were with the government forces. Given the geographical conditions of the island, it was impossible for the rebellion to succeed. Extensive Communist penetration of the constabulary, tensions between the security forces, and the poor quality of local administration allowed the rebellion to establish itself. The premature easing of pressure on the guerrillas over the summer of 1948 gave the insurgency a new lease on life. The shelling of coastal villages in the panic following the SKLP’s New Year offensive drove many persons into the arms of the guerrillas. The fall and spring suppression campaigns were conducted with excessive force causing the deaths of thousands of persons. It was only in the final phases of the rebellion that the need for an amnesty program and political action to complement military operations was recognized. In the end, the guerrillas were overwhelmed by the mobilization of a vastly superior military force. The story of the rebellion is as much one of government failures as of successes.

The rebellion was not just another peasant uprising. The geography of the island, the neglect of the government, dislocated economic conditions, and a tradition of resistance to sudden intrusions of outside

155. FEC, Intelligence Summary, Jan. 16 and 24, 1950, on the Sŏktal massacre and the command shake-up that followed.
authority were similar to past rebellions. But many things had changed since the turn of the century. The 1948 rebellion was directed by a leadership educated in Japan, backed by a highly developed organization, and supported by a population exposed to modern ideas by long residence overseas. The nativistic cast of the 1901 uprising was totally lacking. The issues were explicitly political: opposition to separate elections and support for a Communist government in Korea. The guerrillas were not isolated but drew encouragement from radio broadcasts, limited liaison, and feelings of solidarity with DPRK. Although many islanders, caught between the demands of the guerrillas and the government, threw their support to whichever side seemed stronger, the intensely committed SKLP organizational core stayed with the rebellion to the end. Since nothing less than the legitimacy of the two rival Korean governments was at stake, the traditional formula for settling disturbances on the island could hardly be effective. All these factors contributed to the most striking difference between the 1901 and 1948 rebellion, the latter’s remarkable persistence in the face of impossible odds.

The question of American responsibility and role in the rebellion also has to be addressed. The outbreak of the rebellion must stand as testimony to the failure of the occupation to develop viable policies and establish a workable democracy in Korea. Nowhere else did such a violent outpouring of popular opposition to a postwar occupation occur. The occupation allowed a campaign of right-wing terror to develop after the falling-out with the People’s Committee, with which it probably had too close a relationship to begin with. The decision to get out of Korea and to abandon bilateral negotiations with the Soviets in favor of a United Nations initiative accentuated this turn to the Right and precipitated the events that led to the April 3 uprising. The policy of “minimum force” adopted by General Dean, although perhaps intended to limit public embarrassment while waiting out the summer months until the establishment of ROK, might have succeeded in ending the rebellion, if it had been firmly and consistently applied. It is true that the suppression of the rebellion after Yŏsu was essentially a South Korean show. The tactics employed were standard counter-insurgency techniques that required no special American skill. Still, Americans were present as advisors throughout the pacification campaign and should have attempted to modify the excessive brutality with which the operations were often conducted. The excuse that these excesses were inevitable in any case, and that they should not detract from the main goal of defeating the insurgency, is unconvincing.

The significance of the Cheju-do rebellion, finally, stretched far beyond the narrow confines of the island. The rebellion was one of a number of insurgencies that broke out in other Asian countries as Communist-led nationalist movements resisted attempts to repossess colonial structures in the aftermath of World War II. Despite this basic similarity, there is little evidence to indicate any direct connection.156 On the contrary, the rebellion points out the problems of communication and coordination that plagued the Communist movement in the South. The uprising helped to push the SKLP prematurely into an armed struggle that it could not win. Defections by the constabulary to the guerrillas also alerted the Military Government to a problem of Communist penetration that might otherwise have developed into an even more serious problem. Renewed fighting on the island in October, moreover, precipitated the Yŏsu rebellion, upsetting SKLP plans for a general uprising in the security forces. Finally, the defeat of the insurgency over the spring of 1949 foreshadowed the destruction, using similar tactics, of the mainland guerrilla movement over the following winter.

The rebellion marked a major escalation in the conflict between Left and Right in Korea, forced the pace of events elsewhere, and forged another link in the chain of domestic political violence leading up to the war itself. If nothing else, it also shows the turbulent and disordered condition of Korean politics during these years. This was an important local dimension of the Korean conflict, and the history of the rebellion indicates the harsh reality of Korean politics in this period. Looking back on the rebellion, it is hard to imagine that so violent an event once swept over the now peaceful tourist spot. But one is also left with the feeling that the same potential for violence will continue to exist in Korea so long as it remains in its present hostile and divided state.
