WHY WE FLED FROM SOUTH KOREA



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Why We Fled From South Korea

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FOREWORD

Since her liberation on August 15, 1945, Korea has been divided into two parts, north and south. Despite the ardent wish of the Korean people her reunification is yet to be realized due to the colonial and nation splitting policy of the American imperialists.

In the meantime, North and South Korea have taken entirely different paths. In the northern part of the country the people have taken the power into their hands and a series of social reforms effected. In the northern part of the country—the base of democracy where a people's democratic system has been set up— the people are building a paradise where they can enjoy genuine freedom and happiness. On the contrary, South Korea is being turned into a living hell. Under the fascist rule of the American imperialists and the Syngman Rhee clique the position of the South Korean people is quite hopeless. Abject poverty, forced labour, non-rights, etc., are their lot.

The division of territory and the national split have brought untold suffering and misfortunes to the entire Korean people.

The Korean people in the north and south alike are looking forward to the earliest realization of peaceful unification of the country. People in the North earnestly wish to share their happiness with their fellow men in the southern part, while people in the South fervently desire to lead a life as happy as people in the North.

However, the earnest desire of the Korean people is scorned by the American imperialist invaders and the Syngman Rhee clique, who are bent on plundering and suppressing the people in South Korea. And they are resorting to every trick and all kinds of malicious propaganda to undermine and distort the life in the northern part of the Republic.

But none of their tricks can cover up the real life of the northern part of the Republic before the eyes of the South Korean people, nor could they break the will and desire of the Korean people for the peaceful unification of the fatherland. No matter how hard they try, the American imperialists and the Sygnman Rhee clique could not hide the true state of affairs—social, economic and political—in South Korea. Nor can they crush the earnest longing of the people in South Korea for the northern part. On the contrary, their determination and will for the peaceful unification of Korea has been hardened.

Many of our countrymen from South Korea, who had bravely fought in South Korea for liberty and unification of the fatherland, have come over to the northern part of the Republic. To make their way to the North, indeed, they had to brave all perils including death itself.

The number of those who come to the North is constantly increasing. Workers, farmers, students, particularly a large number of former soldiers of the "ROK Army" have crossed the dividing line to the North to seek a better life. To these freedom-seekers, the Government of the Republic renders every assistance, and those who escaped the cruel hands of Syngman Rhee and his cohorts and of their master—the American colonialists—are pursuing a fruitful new life.

Now they work at factories or farms. Some are studying in higher educational establishments and research institutions, while others joined the glorious ranks of the People's Army, all striving for the reunification of the country.

"Why we fled from South Korea?" Each had his or her own story. There were so many who are eager to tell the story.

Some of their stories contained here will reveal the true picture of the rule of American military occupation and the ardent wish of the Korean people, north and south, for the peaceful unification of their country.

Way to Happiness

Pak Ok Kyung
Ex-ROK Army Senior Nurse

I JOINED the "ROK Army" on October 10, 1950, shortly after the Korean war broke out. Since girlhood I had been a nurse, and they assigned me to the 1st Army Hospital of the ROK Army as soon as I joined the army.

The hospital was in Taegu where I was born and brought up. I was immediately ordered to take a training to become a senior nurse. It was a short course of twenty days but it won me the title of "Second Lieutenant, Senior Nurse of the ROK Army".

On November 1, 1950, I was transferred to the "23rd Army Hospital of the ROK Army" in Woolsan south of Taegu.

When I reached Woolsan, the autumn season had set in. Every hill and mountain was ablaze with autumn colours. The hospital was composed of several buildings, and I was told the more than 10,000 casualties of the "ROK Army" were being "treated", and most of them had been seriously wounded in the battles of Hadong and Yungchun.

Hundreds of severely wounded soldiers were jammed into each room, and if they found "space" they lay down. Of course, the rooms had no beds.

With years of experience as a nurse, I was accustomed to treating serious wounds. But the hospital was most shocking.

It was not until I myself witnessed the wounded soldiers of the "ROK Army" at the hospital that I came to have a clear idea of how horrible and grim the war was. Now and then I asked myself, "Why is it that we have to fight a war?"

From the first day of my assignment to this hospital I did everything that I could do for the wounded. But the

doctors and senior nurses were not much concerned about the patients. The lives of those wounded soldiers meant nothing to them. Their treatment was of a perfunctory nature.

Most of army doctors and senior nurses were those who had been taken away during the temporary retreat of the People's Army. And many of them had relatives who were in the government service of the Syngman Rhee regime.

Many patients died every day. But no one — doctor, nurse, or director — paid any attention to the wounded. Medicines and medical supplies were stolen and sold to get money for feasts at the gay quarters.

I was serving with four nurses, all of whom would do most anything to make money. They stole all the high-priced medicines to feather their own nests. To be sure, they gave plenty of streptomycin or penicillin injections which the dying asked for. But how could they know they had been given a plainwater injection?

The gang of senior-nurses invited me on several occasions to come along with them. After all, according to them, the director and surgeons were making plenty by selling medicine. They would ridicule me by saying that they admitted I was honest but they would be impressed if they were shown how much I made out of it!

The air in the sick-room was always heavy with groans and cries for food. The patients were given a mixed rice-ball and a bowl of salted water. No wonder they were too hungry to care about their wounds. Many actually thought there would be nothing left to be desired if only they had a meal to their hearts' content. But not an evening passed without riotous feasting at the director's quarters. Now and then the patients were promised "better" meals.. The wounded, however, never ate them, because that foodstuff was sold by the hospital officials, the senior nurses included.

This was the true state of affairs in the "ROK Army" hospital, which they, in chorus, called an institute of humanity, mercy, and love!

My horror and disgust over the corruption in the ROK Army life became greater as I got a clearer picture of it.

On December 17, 1950, I was reassigned to the 31st "ROK Army" Hospital in Taijun. A truck took me all the way from Woolsan to Taijun. The truck sped through a snow storm.

The burnt out towns and villages presented such a grim picture, and the cold shivering people were to be seen everywhere. Sometimes they almost blocked the running truck to beg.

It was about ten o'clock in the evening when I arrived at the hospital in Taijun. There I found the whole hospital was packing for a move. The second fall of Seoul was imminent, so they decided to move this hospital to Pusan from Taijun.

In the midst of packing ROK Army officers were busy looting the hospital supplies.

They were actually fighting each other with pistols in hands for a bigger share of the loot.

In Pusan the construction of new hospital buildings was set out at a site near Mt. Keumjung. Thousands of people were dragged into forced labour every day to level hills and cut away rocks. The winter was cold, but most of them were in summer clothes. The young had all been forced into the "ROK Army" service, and the middle-aged and even the old men were driven into forced labour.

Life was intolerable. Hunger was rampant all over South Korea. In Pusan alone many deaths from starvation occurred every day. Most of the people who were dragged into work were too weak to stand hard labour: some sank to the ground with loads of dirt and gravel on their backs; many others fell while cutting stones. Then the ROK Army guards would beat them with gun-butt and kick the victims pouring out curses: "God damn you, You're not sick!"

One day an old man, who was nearly sixty and too weak to carry a big stone on his back, tumbled down a cliff and lay helpless. But a ROK Army officer knocked the poor man with his gun-butt, shouting, "This damn old fool must be a Red's father, pretending he is sick." The blow was so severe that blood spurted from the wound and he fainted.

But the people could take just so much. A crowd of people infuriated by this savagery sprang up upon the officer and trampled him down. They were shouting, "Kill the bastard!"

The panic-stricken soldiers opened fire at the crowd. Several were killed, and many were wounded. This incident kindled my search for truth.

"What's the ROK Army? Was it conceivable that 'an army which claims to be a fighter for the interests of the people and the country' could act like this?" That night I pondered for a long while gazing at the army badge on my cap.

But after that the people who had been dragged to the construction site were even more cruelly beaten. The construction project made little progress and the patients were crowded into the temporarily arranged camps.

With the coming of spring the whole Keumjung Mountain was covered with a pink haze of azaleas. Down the valley flowed limpid water over clean rocks. Spring was really beautiful.

But the "hospital" was so ugly.

There were more than a thousand patients. Tens of patients ran away every day. They were confined like prisoners, and when their wounds were healed to a certain degree, though not well by any means, they were marched off to the front again.

Many begged for further treatment. Then the director drove the pale-faced patients to the front threatening that "complaint makers" would be punished under martial law. But they would rather die than go to the front again. They would do anything to leave the service, pretending they were suffering from all kinds of ailment. Those who had money or power bribed the director and left the army.

Medical officers of the hospital had a nice racket for money-making. They were showered with money when they handed a patient a discharge from the army. But, not a chance for the poor boys! They could not present cash for "the service rendered."

One day a loud cry burst forth from the director's office. I entered the room to find a poor countrywoman, over fifty,

standing in a corner and crying. Her only son had been wounded and was receiving treatment in the hospital.

She was imploring the director to have her son discharged. Her boy was under my care. He became lame in the left leg which had been pierced with a bullet.

But the director refused to give his recommendation for discharge for he could expect no bribe from the poor peasant woman. And in a few days he sent the lame boy back to the front.

Such state of things added to my agony. I began to search for a way out of this miserable "ROK Army" service.

One evening I was on duty. I was walking along the corridor leading to the orderlies' room, when I was called by someone. A senior nurse was beckoning to me from a sick-room with the upper half of her body projecting out of the room. I went back wondering if anything had done wrong with the patient. But she pulled me in and told me that a new patient was hospitalized that day and he had many books which we could borrow to read.

She introduced him to me.

He was a "ROK Army" captain and, as she said, had lots of books. I was invited to borrow whatever I wanted. I first borrowed Roman Rolland's *Jean Christophe* from him.

Among his collection were many books on peace. Whenever I returned to him with thanks the book I had finished, he only smiled saying, "You're an enthusiastic reader, aren't you?"

However, my first meeting with the captain was brief. In July, 1951, he left the hospital for the front, while I was sent to the 31st Army Hospital at Tongdo-sa, an old Buddhist temple in South Kyungsang Province.

The captain introduced me to a friend of his in Tongdo-sa, whom I called on upon my arrival there. I found this new acquaintance very pleasant, and he, too, had a large collection of books, which he offered to lend me.

One day I went to his house hoping to find some word from the captain as he was to get in touch with me through this friend in Tongdo-sa. But, instead of a letter I was given a thick book. It was a fiction *Home Village* written

by Li Ki Yung. The book was well thumbed, and even the title page was almost illegible.

Through this novel, which I read in secret, I came to realize a social contradiction, namely, the ruthless exploitation of peasants by landlords.

In Tongdo-sa, too, there were some one thousand wounded soldiers. The hoary, time-honoured Buddhist temple was turned into a filthy, miserable place.

Each day witnessed scores of patients being carried away dead from this hospital. Corpses were simply dumped all around the nearby valleys.

One day an old peasant came to the hospital. He was so pale and his voice was trembling. He wanted to know what would happen to his son who had joined the army. He added: "I've been to the mountain to gather firewood. And the place was full of discarded bodies of the 'ROK Army' soldiers. I am worried. Maybe my son too is lying dead in a valley like those miserable corpses." Before I realized it I was sobbing with the old man whose tears were rolling down.

But the director of the hospital was furious about the old man. He told him he had no business going into the mountain, and warned him not to utter a word about what he had seen. He threatened the old man.

The temple was situated deep in the mountains, where partisan forces haunted. Engagements took place almost every night, and the doctors, senior-nurses and the director lived in terror of the night.

After some time letters came from my "ROK Army" captain friend. The first one was a particularly long letter, which closed with these words.

"War is ruthless. Everybody wants peace."

His letters meant so much. I didn't think I could pull through without his letters. He wrote he could not live without my love.

One day, after three long months, he dropped at Tongdo-sa to see me. He was on his way back from his "official trip" to Pusan.

How glad I was to see him. Roaming around the paths in the warm autumn sun and in the quiet evening, we talk-

ed on various subjects—the hospital, the front line and the war itself.

Once the conversation turned to ourselves and both of us became very quiet.

I did not know what to do when he said one evening at the end of another long conversation: "I love you!" I only threw my face into his arms.

But could we plan a future? After bidding each other good night, I kept tossing all night, asking the same question over and over.

Evidently he did the same as the first thing he said to me in the morning.

"There is hope for us."

"Yes? What hope?"

"A bright future. The sun shines on our way from the north!"

"From the north" — I almost shouted in my astonishment, then asked him:

"Do you mean the People's Republic?"

"Yes, the People's Republic is the symbol of our hope. It is calling us."

"But, how can I go? I am not a Communist."

"Neither am I. And I don't think I understand clearly what communism means." His answer was very calm and his measured words continued:

"But I want to build a society in which all the working people can lead a happy life, and I'm determined to fight for it."

"...All the working people lead a happy life." I repeated in my mind. He spoke my belief too.

I wished very much we "start" our search for happiness then and there! But he had to go back.

We bade each other farewell but with a bright promise for our future. Soon afterwards they sent me to an ambulance near the front line in Chooncbun.

Choonchun and its vicinities were crowded with U.S. and "ROK" tank and field artillery units. Not far from the hospital where I stationed was a U.S. ambulance unit. On Sundays tens of "U.S. Army" buses brought in Korean women to the U.S. ambulance. Some of the women looked quite elderly.

They were so-called "frontline consolation women for the U.S. troops." They were also called "Yankee women". Most of them were unemployed, war-widows who led a shameful life at the mercy of the U.S. Army men in order to sustain themselves.

I had never seen these "Yankee women" before. But, could there be any more dark insult to womanhood than that which is openly practised by the Syngman Rhee clique who sell Korean women to the Yanks?

And things weren't too different in the ROK Army ambulances when it came to the question of becoming the prey of the U.S. officers. In return the Director was remembered by the Yanks with money and other stuff.

All my surroundings made me sick. And my rising hatred against Syngman Rhee and his gang, and their masters — the U.S. invaders — often made me ask myself, "Why am I here?"

Yet it was by no means easy just to pick up and come over to the North like that. I struggled in agony for a long time. And time slipped by...

Winter blew itself out, and the whole countryside was coming back to life with the approaching spring. Then, one day, my friend came after such a long silence to see me. I felt my life had come back to me. Pouring out his love to me, he said we could seek happiness in the North. The North! Columns of cloumns of clouds as white as cotton were rising far in the northern sky.

"Now, are you determined?" He asked me at the end.

"Yes, definitely!" was my answer.

"I'm resolved to devote myself to you and go with you to the end of the world."

We turned toward the promised land, far away to the north, and embraced each other.

On April 29th, I left Choonchun on leave, and took a truck to Yangkoo—a frontline position. When I arrived at the sentry line of the 7th "ROK" Infantry Division which was serving on the famous Yangkoo line, it was already dark.

I approached a guard and asked him if I could see the captain who was a "brother" of mine. The guard said

firmly 'No'. No soldier stationed at the front could see a visitor without the permission of the Division Commander. But I coaxed him to make an exception, as I had not seen my "brother" for a time and travelled a long distance to see him. At last he picked up a phone to call some one. Soon a soldier appeared. Pointing to the man, the guard said to me, "This is the captain's man. . ."

I followed him in silence, but I was very nervous.

After a brief exchange of greetings, the captain warned me that I should hide myself under the bed whenever there was a knock at the door. I spent five days there and whenever there was a knock, I found myself under the bed.

At midnight, May 1st, we climbed on the top of a hill in front of the trenches. Pointing to the north he said our hope lay over there where the defence line of the People's Army were. I was filled with deep emotion as I stood looking in the direction he pointed. The defence line of the People's Army! The impregnable fortification, I murmured to myself.

On the following day, at 4 o'clock p.m., we left the trench. I followed him disguised as his liaison man.

It took more than two hours to reach no man's land. The sun disappeared behind the western hills, and the whole sky was aflame with the evening glow.

We hid ourselves behind a bush at the foot of a hill until the darkness fell. Then we began to move forward.

After a few tense hours we arrived at a position of the People's Army late in the night.

I grasped the warm hands of the People's Army soldiers. What a happy moment!. . . .

That is how I found the road to happiness. Since then I have been enjoying a happy life in the bosom of the Republic.

At last we were married and with a grand ceremony too. Today we are making a happy home. Last autumn a new member—a son—came to us, who is growing healthily. Six years have already elapsed since I came over to the side of justice. Before long I shall graduate from the People's Economy Institute, which will add more to our

life full of happiness and promises here. All what I have witnessed and felt during the time could not but move me.

Women in the northern part of the Republic are advancing into the fields of political and social activities on equal terms with men, and are working hard for the peaceful unification and prosperity of their fatherland.

My heart always turns to the wretched situation of the women in the southern part of the Republic who are groaning in darkness, poverty and non-rights.

It is my resolve to devote all my energies to the struggle for the peaceful unification of our country so that the women in the other part of the Republic may also enjoy a happy life like us in the bosom of the Republic.

Through the Snow Storm

Kim Sin Sik
Education Unit, 5th Company H.Q., 2nd Battalion, 2nd Regiment, 6th Division, 3rd Army Corps, ROK Army

AS I sit down to record what happened on the evening of October 29th, 1956, it is snowing just like that night. It was the night I made my escape from the hateful life of Syngman Rhee puppet army to a world of life and freedom.

It snowed and snowed. Tonight, too, it keeps coming down in sheets over the whole world. I wonder if tonight there is anyone crossing the demarcation line to the North.

Second Liberation

When Korea was liberated on August 15th, 1945, I was only nine years old. Yet I could sense the joy and happiness over the newly won freedom and independence. However, there was one black cloud which darkened our otherwise happy family.

At the height of the Pacific War the Japanese militarists recruited and forcibly sent many young Koreans to the South-Sea Islands. My father, too, was taken by them in the spring of 1942. Father never left my mind. We anxiously waited for him to come back. Liberation came, and he did come back, and indeed were we happy!

Father was more joyous than anyone else. He kept saying, "Now we were free and independent." Since his return, nearly every day he talked with neighbours and village people. And before long a new signboard went up in my home village—Suksung-ri, Chungwon County, North Choongchung Province. The signboard reads: "The People's Committee of Suksung-ri, Chungwon County, North Choongchung Province."

Young as I was, I, too, rejoiced over the new signboard.

Seven members of our family—father and mother and my brothers—talked of the happy future. First of all, we were to cultivate 2,600 pyung equals of land which we had been working for the Japanese-owned Korean Development Company.

Our dreams, however, were soon shattered to pieces. No sooner had the U.S. Army landed in Korea than the People's Committee signboard in our native village came down. And many who had connection with the Committee were taken by the police. The joy of liberation vanished into the thin air and dark clouds reappeared over our heads threatening our lives. Again we sank deep into the poverty as before under the Japanese, nay, worse than before.

In place of the Japanese-controlled Korean Development Company, an American sponsored new Korean Company came into being. Now we were not working for the Japanese any more, but for the Americans.

When I was 14, that was in 1950, I finished the primary school in my home village and entered a high school in Choongjoo. For a few consecutive years, the farms suffered severe drought. Many peasants were without provisions. And what little grain the farmers had was taken away by the officials of the Syngman Rhee puppet regime on one pretext or another. There were numerous taxes, contributions, interest and what not. Hundreds of farmers could not bear any more and gave up the farm to roam around in the streets of cities.

In the summer of that year the terrible war was imposed on us by the U.S. aggressors and their lackeys—Syngman Rhee and his cohorts in South Korea. But the year was memorable for us. In July the glorious People's Army liberated our village from the U.S. invaders and the Syngman Rhee army.

It was the Second Liberation for my home village! The village was filled with rejoicing and gratification. And the whole population admired high morale, discipline and kindness of the People's Army. If two people got together the first thing they mentioned was how well the

People's Army men were disciplined and how kind they were.

The People's Army that liberated us stopped in our village for a short rest. When time came for them to leave, they literally cleaned and mopped the whole village and even gave away their rations.

The People's Committee signboard which had been put away five years ago came back to be hung in our village again and the flag of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea was flying high above every house-top.

Soon after the second re-liberation of our village the people's power distributed farm land to the farmers. The notorious Syngman Rhee's land reform which was promulgated to exploit the peasants was completely removed.

For the first time in five years our village had good crops. And people were expecting a full harvest minus all the hateful taxes, contributions and interests on loans under the Syngman Rhee regime.

But again a misfortune befell on us. The People's Army was obliged to retreat temporarilly, and the vicious U.S. invaders and the puppet army made their re-appearance in our village.

Dark clouds overshadowed once again. They enacted the murderous land reform law. Thus we were deprived of the second liberation.

Wandering Days

In April, 1952—then I was sixteen years old—I was obliged to leave the high school after only two years.

My family was poverty-stricken like every other farm household. The severe war was at its height and the countryside was going through a hellish life. The Syngman Rhee regime levied the farmers with scores of taxes to fleece them. As I watched my family suffering under the heavy burden imposed on them by the treacherous Syngman Rhee clique, my hatred against them heightened.

I asked myself what good was an education for me! What I needed was money. Money was cure for all, I thought.

To find a job, first I walked round every street and alley in Choongjoo, but to no avail. Then I went to Won-

joo and Sunghwan, South Choongchung Province. Here was U.S. Ordnance Unit No. 053 stationed. I tried to find a job there, but I had no money to get a job. In those days one didn't get a job but bought one. Giving up Sunghwan I proceeded to Asan, where I became a house boy for a farmer named Yi Sung Kyen. Even though he was a farmer he had to earn side money by doing some carpentry. I stayed with this family through the year. But the farming did not work out as was expected and Yi had to give it up.

In January, 1953, I came back to Sunghwan with the little money I had earned. But it was enough to buy a job at the U.S. Army Ordnance Unit No. 053. My job was working in the supply room. There were several Koreans working for them besides me. The Americans treated us like dogs. We were to sweep the cement floor every day and even not a single mark of foot print could be left. If for any reason they felt like kicking someone, we were there to be kicked. And if we used some refuse for covering up rain holes or papering a torn paper door, they would brand us as thieves. The Korean employees lived together within the compound.

Afterwards I was removed from the supply room and put in the ammunition room. My job was to unload shells from trucks and pile them up neatly. The cases of shell were very heavy to lift. If I was a bit slow, the guards would give a good kick. And sometimes at the end of a day they would not give the pay slip. Then in the night they would send me out to find women for them. I could not bear the work any more and left Sunghwan in February for Pusan.

In Pusan I hoped to find a better job but I landed in another U.S. Army Unit. It was U.S. Army Unit No. 445, and here too my job was unloading ammunition from ships. I was on this job about five months when a truce was reached.

With the Armistice, the city of Pusan was flooded with unemployed. Thousands and thousands of people roamed the streets hoping to find something. It was a miserable picture.

More than twelve hours a day I had to unload ammunition. The physical exhaustion left no room for anything else but crawling into bed. Sometimes I wondered about my family. Not infrequently I thought I should quit the job, and return to them. Then I would say to myself, "What good would it do since I have no money?" I would only be another burden to them. And I was sure that they were having a hard time. So, I would wait until I make some money to go back to them.

One afternoon in August I was resting, looking far out into the sea. Isn't there be anything better than this? I kept asking. Then all of a sudden I thought of my uncle who had come to see us after the second liberation of our village. When he came, he told a lot about the North, the Workers' Party and the Government of the Republic. Then he talked about Marshal Kim Il Sung—all new to us. And he added that unlike the South, life was easy in the North.

I decided to go to Inchun where he lived. When I located him in Inchun, he had a small dry-goods store. He was very glad to see me. During my stay with him, I learnt more about the North. Though I longed for the North, it seemed there was very little I could do about it. I was then only seventeen years old. In October that year my uncle found me a job in Seoul, in a water-proof materials shop.

Caught In A Lasso

One day in January 1954, I went down to Inchun to pay a visit to my uncle. I had not seen him since I came to work to Seoul some months before. While I was walking along the street towards my uncle's place, suddenly several men blocked my way and grabbed me. I was caught in their lasso. With the cry of "March", they were grabbing right and left every able-bodied young men on the street. Of course, if I had money I could have gotten out easily!

I was taken to an assembly center in Poopyung. The place was barbed-wired heavily and the policemen lined up at intervals of 20 meters. The center was a half cave. The police crowded some 1,500 young people into a

place hardly big enough for 600. I spent three months there. During that time we were given just handful of cooked barley. Sometimes families of some prisoners would come for visit. On those occasions they had to buy their meals at the center store paying three times the regular price. The puppet police never missed a chance to collect.

At last, in April I was taken to the military training station in Ronsan, South Choongchung Province.

Life in the training station was a miserable one indeed. The whole system had become so corrupt it was every fellow for himself now. The bigger ones got a bigger share than the next in rank, and so on down.

But, of course, if one had money, things were a little better. You could get away without the so-called training. Once you were out on training, each man contributed 30-50 won to buy lunch for the training officer. Sometimes the training officer would tell us beforehand we should take along our lunch — a few slices of bread — and cigarettes. When we reached the training field, then the officer would collect all the bread and cigarettes and sell them. When new recruits came in, they were robbed off everything by the officer. No one received rations and supplies because there were so many in line to pocket these.

At any rate, I finished the training and became a "ROK army man of the free world." I was sent to the 3rd Artillery Unit in Choonchun. From then on, I served with various units.

In September, 1956, the regiment to which I belonged was stationed near Biari Hill in the County of Yangkoo. The snowfall around this region was unusually heavy that winter. Military supply routes were blocked and some four hundred men of the puppet army were frozen to death.

At this time I started to plan to cross over to the North. Since my staying with my uncle I had been thinking of an escape from the South to the North. And the place where I was stationed was a most ideal place to plan an escape. It was near the demarcation line and I studied carefully the geography of the region.

To prepare my escape, I thought, I would need some bullets, which I secured with some difficulty.

The next question was how to evade the patrol to make my escape. No good thought came to me and it made me waver in my planning. Should I go through with it? If I do, would the People's Army receive me? — I, a man of the Syngman Rhee puppet army. Perhaps they might shoot me if I was caught. But I remembered. I saw with my own eyes how they helped the village folks when my native village was liberated by them in July, 1950. Didn't they give the land to the farmers?

And what did my uncle say about the North? Yes, I must get out of this place to the land of freedom. They say this is a part of the free world. But what freedom? Only freedom to be starved and abused! Haven't I experienced all this? I must go to the land where happiness awaits.

It snowed heavily the night of 29th of October, 1956. This was the night I was waiting for. Fortunately the company commander went to bed very early. And a first class private Moon Jang Yul was on patrol duty. I went up to him and said that he looked very tired and needed rest. The company commander was away, I told him, for a birthday celebration. I would take over the patrol duty while he took a rest.

Now, I was all alone. I cut off the telephone wires and I started out through snow storm. I made sure that Moon was sound asleep.

Holding a gun in my hand in the heavy snow storm I climbed over a mound. I did cross over the demarcation line. I kept running. I had no idea exactly how far I had gone. Soon dawn broke and the snow kept coming down, even more heavily. Exhaustion and tension, or relief since I was safely in the North — I do not know — only this I remember, I fell!

When I woke up I was lying on a bed in a People's Army quarters. How happy I was! Safely I had reached the land of happiness where there is true liberty and freedom. I am now in the tender bosom of my fatherland! Gone are the four years of my life of misery and shame in the Syngman Rhee puppet army.

Today I am devoting myself, heart and soul, to study.

Confession

Pak Ju Chang
Former U.S. H.I.D. Spy

IT WAS a silvery night. A pale new moon was hanging low in the western sky.

The sea was rolling. Swelling waves rushed in as if to swallow the little boat, crashing against the side of it and sending up columns of white spray. The wind was still raging. The little engine tugged towards the north, now on the top of towering waves and then emerging from the wall of water.

We must have travelled, I figured, more than four hours. It was eleven o'clock at night when we left, so we must have covered a good distance. Before long we would reach our destiny.

"Hey, Ju Chang. How about a smoke?" — all of a sudden Captain Choi Mul Kai shouted, feeling his way toward me with unsteady steps.

I was too sea sick to smoke. I shook my head at the captain. He had already lit a cigarette, and taking a long puff, said, "No? What's the matter? Don't be so scared. Have one Lucky!" Offering me the Lucky Strike he kept on:

"You gotta have guts, you know! Specially if you wana do any thing like this —"

I took one of his cigarettes without answering him. Again the captain called me.

"Look, you won't forget your pledge, will you?"

"Of course, not!" I answered crushing the cigarette under my foot. My heart was very heavy and as I stood up against dark sea I could picture the face of major Kim with his dark-horned glasses, and a few Americans whom Kim always went around with. I still remembered what they had said at harbour a while ago.

"No. 26 and No. 27 are headed for your home towns. Things will be much better since you know everybody over there. Do well! If you succeed you will be much better since you will be sent to paradise." (That's their name for America.)

Then Kim stared at me a few moments and continued, clinching his fist:

"If you double-cross us, it will be just too bad for you. If the Reds don't dispose of you, we will . . ."

What he meant was only too clear to me. They would not stop at anything. I had no choice but to submit myself to their bidding.

They ordered me to spy on military establishments, deployment of armed forces, and to stage disturbances in the rear. With this ugly job before me, which I knew nothing about, I was on my way to my native village where my aged parents were waiting for me. To a village where my family had been living and where I grew up.

At long last the wind blew itself out. The seagoing was smooth by now, and here and there in the distance I could see white sea birds flying against the morning sky.

My cousin Ju Ho who had crawled up beside me and standing up on his feet, said in a loud voice.

"Look, Ju Chang! There is Yu Do Island." He was just a lad, but he and I were on the same "mission". We were both fishermen's sons who were used to life on the sea.

"Yeh? Already?" Holding the hand of my young cousin I looked in the direction he was pointing. He must have been excited. He was trembling. As I sensed his tenseness I could not help remembering the last words of major Kim as we were leaving. He told me:

"If you know the other one is going to double-cross you get rid of him, otherwise you won't be safe."

I was sure that Kim had told the same to my cousin. In other words, we were buddies but had to work as enemies as well. The lad whose hand I was holding had parents back home. Should I keep suspecting and hating him? Because we do not know what we would do to each other . . . . I gave him a firmer grip. My cousin, as if he was reading my thoughts, asked with a worried look, "What is the matter?"

The captain looking at his watch ordered us to be ready. There wasn't much to prepare really, everything was ready when we made our shoe strings tighter and picked up our bags. The boat-lamp signalled a couple of times and eventually the engine stopped. Choi Mul Kai walking ahead of us said, "Come along!" When we were out on the deck, I saw a little boat ready. This was the boat which will take us to the land. Mul Kai rowed the boat noiselessly. Swiftly our boat glided toward the shore. I couldn't tell whether it was a village or forest, and I could even hear dogs barking in the distance.

I was nearing home. My native village! I would see my aged father and mother. I would be happy to be home, had I been returning home as an honest man. But I was coming home under the ugly name of spy! My heart began pounding and I trembled all over me as oars cut softly through the water. Suddenly Choi Mul Kai in a low voice ordered me:

"Get ready to land!" We stood up, and the rocks on the shore came into sight. We were some ten meters, I thought, from the shore.

"Hurry up!" he said.

"No, let's go a little further."

"Shut up! Hurry up!"

He pushed us into the water with a big splash. The water about knee deep.

For a few moments, not knowing what to do, we just stood in the water. Then as if by mutual decision we started moving towards the shore. As we waded along, it seemed, the whole sea was echoing with our splash. A cold chill ran up my spine. But what good would it do now? Then I started to run toward the village, and my cousin was right behind me.

Before long the loud cawing of crows broke the slumber of the village.

The little fishermen's village of Manchoon meaning "full spring" on the eastern coast, about ten miles from Sinchang, is the place where I was born. It is a small village of some 20 houses.

My father Pak Yung Soo was a diligent man. He inherited 1,000 pyung of land from his father. Besides, whenever he could manage he fished. He worked hard doing many person's work all by himself. Though a seaman, he seldom took any drink. He owned a small fishing boat once. After liberation I entered the Industrial Technical College in Heungnam in 1948. My father was very pleased to have a college student in the family — I was the only son — saying that since the country was liberated we should study as much as we could. The land redistribution did not effect my father's holdings, and our family enjoyed a tranquil life. Those were the happiest days of my life.

The college was well equipped and I knew little want in my school days. My family was better off and I was on a Government scholarship. At the end of each term I came back to the village bringing presents for the family members and friends. And I was quite "popular" among the village maidens. When I came back home on holidays, mother used to have tears in her eyes. Then father would complain to her, saying:

"Must you cry?"

"I cannot help it". This was her standing answer.

I left school before the end of the first year. I left because I had little interest in schooling. My marks were low. My teachers tried to coax me to continue the school but I was not interested.

After I left school I decided to help father in fishing. The sea life was very pleasant and I liked fishing. But my father tried to stop me from doing any hard work. He himself managed to do everything by himself.

The peaceful days, however, could not last. On June 25, 1950 peace was shattered! On this date the American imperialists and the Syngman Rhee clique started war. And many village young people asked to be sent to the front.

Fearing that I might join the army, my mother used to tell father she would die if I were enlisted. Father answered. "What could we do if he wants to go!"

It was very difficult for me to make my mind. Many of my friends bade me farewell as they left the village. They would say:

"You know, I'm leaving for the front. I feel it's the duty of young people to fight bravely."

On these occasions I only blushed. I wanted to serve the country in the crisis like a man.

In November the People's Army had to make a temporary retreat. Bitter cold and confusion reigned over the village. No sooner had the American forces and Syngman Rhee's "National Army" occupied village than they started butchering people. So and so was killed today and so and so will be shot tomorrow.

I was in a state of bewilderment.

A group of former landlords and pro-Japanese elements formed a "Peace Preservation Corps" and kept asking me to join their ranks. This I refused because I saw how savagely they beat up my brother-in-law for a member of the Workers' Party. Mother used to warn me against those people, saying that they were not human beings but animals.

Toward the end of December, the People's Army started their counter offensive. In the face of the might of the People's Army the American and Syngman Rhee armies hastily took to their heels. The Americans threatened people with atomic bombs, which scared me out of my wits.

"Will the American devils kill off every Korean? We are old, so we will stay. But I want you to go with them." With these words mother asked me to leave our native village. So with a little bundle mother prepared for me I left with my cousin in a small boat... Should I say more about this! It was beginning of my shameful life.

After three days on the sea we landed in the South. But the miserable fate befell us. In such places as Sikcho, Jumoonjin, Samchuk, and Choonchun we were baggage boys, day labourers and what not.

Four years later, I was hired as a porter of a hotel in Hoopo. From dawn to late hours of the night I did everything: collected fire wood on the mountain, carried water, built fires, waited on the table and did the cleaning. Even though I worked so hard, I was not given three square meals a day. The hotel owner would slap my face if he caught me dozing, and yell out, "How dare you?" I had

to wipe my bleeding nose in silence.

"Why do we have to live like this?" I asked often.

One evening my cousin, who had also no job, said to me, "Ju Chang! Let's go to Pusan. They say money is easy over there."

It was customary for him to come to see me every night, and share the left-overs I had collected to eat.

"What do you know about Pusan?"

"I hear they are hiring sailors. And if you are hired you will see every country in the world!"

"Gee! That sounds good!"

To me any place sounded better than where I was. We decided to proceed to Pusan. For that we needed money and identification cards. The money did not worry me. I knew I could get money somehow, by stealing, to be frank. And my cousin will forge identification cards.

One evening the chance I had been waiting for came. The hotel manager sent me to collect 6,000 hwan from one of his debtors. With that 6,000 hwan we left the place.

For two days we ran and ran over the hills and through the forests. Then we took a train to Choonchun. But when the train pulled into Choonchun the police was waiting for us. For months we were in custody and were beaten almost to death.

When we were released from the police station, literally we were beggars. A month of hard labour completely weakened us, and there were no jobs to be had. So we had to beg round to sustain ourselves. I don't know why but housewives of better houses were more unkind. They would ask why two such husky fellows should beg. There were many days we had nothing to eat.

One day we were as usual wandering about in the city. Out of the blue someone called:

"Hey, you! Ju Chang!" To hear my name called really startled me because I never even dreamed there was anyone in that place who knew me. I looked around, and there stood a boy from our home village, Yang Ha Joon.

"My, what a surprise! I never expected to see you here," I said extending my hand. He looked prosperous. He was well dressed and had even a strong perfume on him.

"You must be doing alright!"

"Yeh, not too bad. I am working in a company here."

"Say, you are an old friend of mine. You and I are just like brothers. Will you help me please! Find a job for me or do something!"

Then I told him my sad story reminding him that we had nothing to eat since the day before.

We walked along the street of Choonchun. Then we came upon a bar which he led us into. Apparently the place was his hang-out, for he was very familiar with all the waitresses.

He ordered drinks and food. Soon we felt the effects of the wine.

"Do you really want a job?" he asked.

"Yah, anything! Just get me something".

" . . . I think I get you! . . . You said you wanted to go back to your home village. I think I can fix it. Look, meet me here at 3 p.m. the day after tomorrow."

As we parted, he handed me over 2,000 hwan, saying the money would tide us over until we saw him again. He paid his bill and asked the waitresses to keep the change. With 2,000 hwan we managed until the designated date. On that day we went to the bar and waited for him. In the afternoon, as he promised, he showed up. An old taxi drew up to the bar and he beckoned us to hop in. We found he was with a stranger. We drove about an hour before we stopped in front of an old temple. He led us into a small room and said:

"This is where you are going to work." I was rather surprised and asked him:

"Isn't this a temple? What do you mean we're going to work here?"

"From now on you are on your own. You'd better fill up these forms." Saying so he handed over some forms and a pen to us. Then he asked us to write down what he dictated:

"We Pak Ju Chang and Pak Ju Ho swear that we shall not reveal the facts and information made known to us by Yang Ha Joon and the same to be known to us in the

future, concerning H. I. D. 36 Group . . . ." As he finished reading he asked us:

"Did you put down everything? . . . Alright! Then sign it."

I did not grasp fully what was going on and put down my signature as told. Putting the papers in his pocket he said:

"I expect you both return to your native village and help our work."

"What do you mean?"

"What your precise mission will be, you'll be told later."

"What? Spy? We don't like to become dirt".

"What? So you think you are a big shot or something?" His voice rose and his eyes shot fire. He continued:

"So, you still like to roam around?"

"That's why I asked you to get me a job, wasn't I?"

"So, what's wrong with this job? Think it over. Because you'll have plenty dough."

"I simply can't do it. I rather die first!"

"Alright, if you say so. I only wanted to help you. I've wasted my time on a chicken heart. We are through. Just return the money."

"I don't have any money with me. But you will get your money when I get a job."

"I cannot wait that long. Where do you think I get the money? Picking it up off the street, you think?" He stood up and continued.

"So, make up your mind. Either you go back to your beggar's life or you make a lot of money with little work. The work is easy and plenty of money will be coming your way. Just think, with that money you can get married, too."

I didn't know what to do. He fired another question at me.

"What do you say?"

"Alright!" I answered hanging my head. Then my cousin, too, agreed. Hearing our answers he looked satisfied.

"I knew you would."

We spent a few days at the temple before we were taken to a strange village some ten hours' drive to the

north. I think it was the neighbourhood of Sookcho. The place was filled with Syngman Rhee armymen and there were many places barbed-wired and hung with signs "Restricted Area."

We were led into a house where we found many officers of the "National Army" and Americans. One of the officers came up to look me over.

"He looks O.K." were his words. Then an American said something. I imagined the American was saying he, too, thought so. Then they asked us a lot of questions if we were healthy, whether we knew Russian or Chinese and so on. They wanted to know if we've married or how many relatives we had back home. They made us to remove our clothing for physical check up.

"They'll do," said both of them.

In the evening we were taken to the headman of the H.I.D. 36 Group who said in a stern but low voice:

"From now on you and I are one body. If I'm the head you are my limbs. We must work together. If my hand or leg does not move at my bidding, then..." he gestured with one hand, cutting the air. The meaning was clear enough without words.

On the following day we were taken to an army barrack where we were to receive training. This was a spy school. How many classes there were and how many were being trained to become spies, all these were top secrets. The class we were in had two more men besides us. They said they were from some place near Chungjin. I suppose they were pulled in here under the same circumstances as we were. We were not allowed to call names but were known to each other by numbers. I was No. 26, my cousin 27, and other two fellows No. 8 and No. 61.

From early morning till late hours in the evening we had classes on sending messages, geography and observation and many other things. After two months of class work we were given field training. We were taught how to walk without making a noise, how to survey countryside, distinguish military installations from others. In addition, we were trained to use a knife, and learned first-aid treatment and how to evade pursuit and record ciphers. Most of

the instructors were Syngman Rhee Army officers. Very often U.S. Army officers came to see our training. Toward the end of the course we learned how to use poison gas.

The school buildings which consisted of many small houses were barbed-wired all around, and guards stood all over the place. One day we were taken out of the school compound, and we found the whole school building looked something like a warehouse. It even had some sort of sign on the door with an inscription to that effect.

After six months the training was over and we were taken to be introduced to Captain Choi Mul Kai. We were told we would be under his charge from then on. Choi was in plain-clothes. He seemed servile, and kept bowing to his "boss." He had an office on the other side of the hill, where we took lodging. Then we sat down to work out a scheme for infiltrating into the north.

If we were able to land near Wonsan, or perhaps even farther north than Wonsan, let us say either Hamheung or Heungnam, it would be very good, but as much as this was impossible under the present circumstances, we decided to land near our home village. Soon as we landed we were to establish ourselves near a market place and proceed to organize a network. Here we were to recruit traders, dissidents and those officials who had been punished. We tried to seek employment at some government office. We were to collect information on military installations, movements of the army, coastal patrols and names of important officials, as well as spread rumours and set fire to government buildings and factories. We prepared ourselves with all kinds of identification cards including citizenship papers, Democratic Youth League papers and military papers. We were also provided with tens of thousands of won and with all kinds of medicines. We were instructed further: should any emergency occur, we should either burn or chew up the code book.

When everything was ready, we waited for a day to start. On a stormy evening we headed for the North. Until then I had felt little about the whole thing since we were comfortably provided for and we were busy with our "studies." But the night when we started towards north as spies I could not help feeling that we headed for certain death.

On the other hand the feeling of going home ran through me. Dear faces of father and mother came to my mind, and I said to myself, "Father, I'm coming to see you even though I am a spy."

When we reached the shore, we found that it was not a village but the foot of a hill we had seen from the boat. We hid ourselves behind a huge rock while we dried our wet clothing. Then we proceeded northward. During the day we took cover under rocks and at night we made our way avoiding the patrols. It was tough going. Sometimes we were on the outskirts of villages. The villages looked peaceful and their chickens fat. Farmers were busy in sowing.

Everything looked different from the South. And the further we went, the more I was bewildered. A few days later we reached Wonsan. And it was indeed a surprise to us as we remembered well how it looked on our way to South. It had then been in total ruin, but now it was fast being rebuilt.

Asphalted streets ran in all directions and many apartment houses were going up. Huge cranes were to be seen all over the city — such huge cranes as I had never seen before. I could not help feeling ashamed of myself when I saw many young people were proudly working to rebuild the city. The people of Wonsan seemed to be the symbol of a happier future! We said to each other, "Certainly it has changed!"

We went everywhere — market places, drinking places and inns but we could not find a place to settle down. Every night, I went to a drinking place trying to drink down my woes and misery. Unlike myself everyone who came there was enjoying himself after the day's work.

For the following few days I roamed around the city in deep thought. How the land had changed! How could I do such thing to the people who are enjoying a free and happy life under the people's power? Am I a human being or beast? And I am endowed with conscience! Then, how could I act against these people? I would rather die first!

The more I thought the heavier my heart felt over my past wrong doings. A furious indignation against the treacherous Syngman Rhee clique overtook me.

One day I noticed a public announcement posted on a bulletin board. It said that if a spy should confess voluntarily to the authorities he would be treated generously. The announcement was issued in the name of the Minister of Interior. It was entirely different from what I had been told in South.

Two of us stood in front of the bulletin board and kept looking at it and wondering if it was a trick. Perhaps they would kill us if we submitted ourselves to them. But they might not.

"Do you believe all this?" asked my cousin.

In the evening at the inn where we were staying I decided to submit myself to them.

But how about my cousin? Would he try to harm me, if he knew my intention? Maybe he would not, but who can tell? I decided to go back to my native village where my parents lived.

When my train pulled into Shinchang it was dark already. It was quite a distance to our village from the station and it was early morning when we reached home. The whole village was still in slumber. Before long my house — the white walled house — came into view. This is the place where I grew up. I wondered how my girl friend, Gotboon was getting along. She must have grown up! I could have dashed into my house but quietly I entered the front gate and called out, "Mother, I am home!"

In the same evening my cousin and I went to the village militia office and made a clean breast of secret.

To our surprise the officer said:

"We are very glad you made up your minds to come to see us. We knew of your presence here, and we have been watching your movements closely. We are certainly glad to see you." They were very kind.

Now, all my wrong doings are in the past. I am enjoying my happy life at the Shinchang Fishery. My cousin, too, is working. Sometime ago I received bonus, with which I bought new blouse material for mother. I guess she could not believe actually it happened. With tears in her eyes, over and over again she said that she did not believe that it could

happen. Father looked pleased and puffing at his pipe he said:

"You've got to marry. No use you hide it in your mind. I mean Miss Gotboon."

I felt contented. The spring breeze made my heart warmer.

TO SEEK A WAY TO STUDY

KIM HO CHUL
Former student of Kyoon Myung High School, Seoul

NEARLY one year had passed since I entered school. During that time I was annoyed several times by the numerous student gangs planted there by the police. But I also won many friends and developed a liking for school.

The last class for the day—a history class— was about over when one of the pupils asked the teacher:

"Teacher, you said that our history started with Tangoon, a mythological figure. And it was said 'he' was originally a bear, but was humanized by God's will. But this is different from what we learned in biology. We are supposed to have evolved from the monkey. You're saying now that human beings have their origin in the bear, isn't that right?"

The teacher did not answer immediately but looked at him over his glasses for a moment. Then he answered in a solemn voice:

"Everything was created by God. Therefore, our ancestors were sons of God." The teacher didn't look any too comfortable. But the class would not let the matter rest there. Because only a short while ago he told the class that Tangoon was a woman. Another student stood: "Teacher, a few minutes ago you told us Tangoon was a woman, then why do you call Tangoon a son of God?" This question made the whole class giggle. But luck was with the teacher. No sooner had the student sat down than the recess bell rang. Before the teacher left the class room he demanded that those two students should come to the student advisor's office.

When the class was dismissed, the whole body of students burst into laughter. Some were saying if 'he' were a woman it meant the matriarchy was practised in the early

human socities. Another broke into inquire if it was all right to combine history with mythology.

When I came outside leaving behind the rabbling class the spring air was very refreshing though it was still quite cool. No more snow was to be seen on the cap of Samgak Mountain and willows were tinged with green. I was basking in the sun leaning against a wall when Jo, one of my friends, came up and asked if I had lunch. Before giving him my answer, I asked him if he had eaten. Then we both laughed, for this was a standing joke. Many students went without lunch and he and I belonged to a group which called itself "skip-a-meal" group.

After lunch hour I was called by my teacher at the end of the physics class. I knew right away why he was calling me. The contribution money! Because several times already I had been in his office to say that it was simply impossible for me to raise 7,500 *hwan*. Knowing that mother never could raise this money I did not even mention this contribution money to her. It had been only about a year ago that she had such a time raising 12,000 *hwan* as the entrance fee. I remember mother selling her dresses and all the suits which had been kept in memory of father. And then she had to borrow some from our unwilling uncle.

As I entered the faculty room I was very uneasy all over again. The dean was sitting by class teacher. They demanded that I should contribute the money within a week. The American educated dean expressing impatience over my silence stood up, and said I should not report to school unless the money was in my pocket. Then he walked out of the room. And my teacher did not say a word but leafed through a book which was in front of him.

When I came out of the faculty room, a class in my favorite subject—geography—was going on. But I didn't feel like going in. I kept roaming around the school compound trying to think what to do. How could I raise the money? I wanted to stay in school. Eventually another school day ended and all the pupils went home. I had to go home, too. I went into my class room to pick up books. Somehow the empty class room seemed more silent and quiet that day.

As I was coming out of the front gate, I met my physics teacher who was on his way home. He wanted to know if I was ill because I looked so pale. I liked my physics teacher very much. He was respected by every student. He may have been in shabby clothes but he taught well and had an understanding heart. He knew the situation the students faced.

As we walked along together I explained to him the difficulties I was in about the contribution money. He patiently listened to me, then slowly said:

"I wish I could do something for you. Only a few days ago a teacher made a suggestion to the school authorities to cancel or reduce the amount of contribution money. But this was rejected on a ground that the school was short of funds. Why don't you ask your class advisor if you could pay by installments?"

As usual I made my way to the school on the morning after a sleepless night. I wanted to go into class, but I could not, remembering what the American educated dean had told me the day before. I waited for the class to start. Afterwards I walked into my teacher's office. After some hesitation I asked him if there was any way for me to pay the contribution by installments. Of course, I knew no one was allowed to pay the contributions by installments. But I took a chance, because the school meant everything to me and I wanted to study. At last, my teacher—a kind man—said gently that he would ask the school principal.

After some anxious moments on my part he returned from the principal's office. I could judge from his expression what the answer was.

"I'm afraid the answer is no," he said.

It was the end of my school days. How hard did I tried to get in school! And how happy my admittance had made mother despite her difficulties in raising the enormous entrance fee! Now, I would see no more my school-mates and teachers.

My teacher, too, was very much disturbed. He kept looking out of the window. He was almost biting his lips and his eyes glowed with anger. Feeling that my presence

burdened him more, I stood up and bowed silently and walked out.

So the contribution money closed the school door to my face. Of course, they call it "contributions" to school expenses. But every one knew that school owners or influential teachers pocketed the money they forced from the students and their parents on every kind of pretext.

Every morning I went out pretending I was going to school. But there was no school for me. To make her think that I was in school I spent "the school hours" in roaming around the streets of Seoul. Very often I stopped and watched the traffic. Big streets, noisy automobiles, loud jazz tunes and crowds of people—all these seemed very far from me. As a matter of fact, I was in a totally different world!

One day during my usual "school hours," suddenly a strange woman's voice stopped me in the street. When I turned around, there stood Yong Ok, one of my former neighbours whom I grew up with in Wonjoo. I heard she was a sales-girl in some department store in Seoul. But Yong Ok who stopped me in the street was an entirely different girl. She was heavily painted. Her eyebrows were painted and her red lipstick seemed all over her face and even on her fingernails. The suit she had on was so unbecoming. She was, I thought, trying to copy some cheap Hollywood actress. She looked me up and down to express her disappointment. She thought I would look good after so many months in Seoul.

While we were talking a well-dressed middle-aged man came up to her calling "Miss Anna". Now, Yong Ok was "Miss Anna!" Then she was in his arms. The man whispered something into her ear which made her titter loudly. Before they walked far, she came back to me. Then she opened her handbag and took out a 100 *hwan* bill to put in my hand. I was simply dumbfounded and I could not help remembering the days in Wonjoo as I watched her going. How naive and innocent she was then! She was madly in love with Pak Kyung Chul, one of my schoolmates. Who would have expected that this girl would become a street walker in Seoul?

I felt I had to talk to somebody. I thought of Jung Kyung Rok with whom I had been friend since my early childhood. He and I had vowed to be brothers. He is now an attendant to Son Dal Joo, Chief of Staff of the R.O.K. 26th Division.

When I went to the government building where he worked, unlike previous occasions, it was easy to see him. My friend was free because his boss was away on a visit to the Philippines.

As we walked we told each other what had happened. He told me he could not bear any more his life with the Syngman Rhee puppet army. In reality he was a personal servant of Son Dal Joo. He was subject to every sort of abuse and insult. He had to fetch water for Son's mistresses. He had to stand outside when the boss spent the night in drinking or when he spent a night with a prostitute. And my friend knew where his boss got the money to dine and wine himself. The money came from selling rice and clothing which were allocated to his men. Kyung Rok was furious and repeatedly said he had enough.

When I told him about my expulsion from the school he said that in North Korea students studied on state scholarship. Then in a hushed voice, he said:

"Let's go to North!"

I recalled the experiences I had in Wonjoo during the war time. How proudly students from Kim Il Sung University, Kim Chaik Polytechnical Institute and Pyongyang Medical College spoke on their happy student life in the North. Then they also emphasized the bright future the youth faced in the North. How we envied them! Then there were many People's Army personnel and political workers who impressed us very deeply. Why hadn't I thought of North Korea sooner instead of rambling aimlessly through the streets of Seoul? I made up my mind to seek a way to study in the North. It was like a beacon in darkness.

A few days later I saw my friend Jung Kyung Rok again to tell him that my mind was made up. He said he

knew the way to the North. And we began to make necessary preparations.

Not a word did I mention to my mother about the expulsion. But somehow she got wind of it and one evening she called me and said:

"Had your father been alive, I'm sure, things like this would not happen. Because we are poor you can't go to school. But I know some day there will be a change."

I wanted to say, "Mother, don't worry. I am not going to wait for the change here. I am going to the North to study," but I only said, "I can study alone. So, please don't worry." Then I asked her if I might go to our home town, Wonjoo, for a little visit.

I called on some of my relatives and Pak San Il, a former class mate, in Wonjoo.

Pak San Il and I have been friends for a long time. Even though we were seperated by distance—he in Wonjoo and I in Seoul— our friendship became firmer. He was attending then the Wonjoo High School. According to him, his brother who was in a university was arrested by the police. He objected the forced recruitment into the army, and was branded as "Red". His eldest brother, the mainstay of the family, who was in contracting business faced bankruptcy. I turned the matter over in my mind as to whether I should tell him of my plans, but I was a bit reluctant. Once such information leaked out, every terror organization in schools such as the Patriotic Students Association, Student Advisory Committee, etc., would send me to jail.

But Pak San Il had been my trustworthy friend for a long time. And after much thought I revealed my secret to him, adding that he should come along with me. Pak was very hesitant, saying there was no one whom he knew in North Korea and he would not know what to do there. I did not coax him any more but asked him to keep the secret. But as I bade him goodbye, I asked him to come to Hwachun Village near the demarcation line on the 25th of April, should he change his mind. On my return to Seoul I found the whole city in a great uproar

with the coming so-called Presidential Election. With a slogan "Time for a change! We cannot go on like this!", the Democratic Party came out against Syngman Rhee who was scheming life-time Presidency. And the progressives too had their candidates. But all this tumult meant nothing to me as I thought the puppet show staged by the U.S. occupation forces would bring no good to the people. It was an empty game of electing somebody for the Presidency at the nadir of degradation.

To me there was only one avenue open. To the North! I went to see my friend Kyung Rok. While I was waiting for him outside the building I saw five or six officers and men in the Syngman Rhee army uniform being dragged away. They were beaten almost to unconsciousness. A few American soldiers in sun glasses looking down from upstairs were laughing loudly.

Fear gripped me suddenly, lest my friend Kyung Rok was in the group. But to my joy, he showed up about that time. He explained to me that those men were beaten up because of their negative votes in a straw vote! I checked again with Kyung Rok the date when we would cross over the North.

Ahead of my friend, I went to Wonjoo on the 24th of April. The following day Kyung Rok arrived with two Syngman Rhee army uniforms. To my delight, there came also my friend Pak San Il who was not too sure when I met him last. Holding my hand firmly, he said that he would go with us in search of a new life. His deep yet calm voice showed his determination.

As the night fell, we three climbed up a little hill nearby. Dead silence seemed to envelop us. The moon cast her soft beams upon the earth. Tomorrow evening we would leave this place — South Korea —for the North. And we could not suppress our profound emotions as we stood on the hill top. We bit our forefingers to soak a handkerchief with our blood and buried it deep in the ground. We did this to express our wish that the downtrodden South Korea would rise up soon, and as a symbol of our vow loyalty to each other until we reached North Korea and to share death, if need be.

April 26—it was the crucial day. Every road in and out of Hwachun was filled with heavy guns and tanks. Pak and I changed into the puppet army uniform as the student uniforms were conspicuous around this region. Moreover, the army uniform would serve our end better as the whole area was crowded with the white American M. P. cars and M. P. boxes.

We started out after dark. We climbed over barbed wires and came to a sign which indicated a M. P. box. Jung said because of those M.P. boxes we had to take mountain paths, nearly 20 miles.

As we made our way through the mountain we could see bivouacs of Syngman Rhee's men all around us. It was getting quite late and even one rolling little stone would resound through the mountain air. Even our own breathing seemed so loud.

Now, we came to another bivouac which we had to go around. We inched our way by crawling. Suddenly we saw a Syngman Rhee's army patrol sitting a few metres away from us. We flattened ourselves to the ground to watch how this man acted. Presently the man began to sing.

My native village
That I long for,
My native village
Which I dream of.
But far, far
Am I from
My dear home . . . .

He was singing in a very sorrowful tone. We could not tell whether it was from homesickness or from his fill of the puppet army life. But we were glad he was singing because we could pass over the tight spot with little difficulty.

We spent two days in the mountains and by that time all our provisions were exhausted and the cold was penetrating. According to Jung Kyung Rok the ridge we were on was none other than Maibong Ridge.

On this ridge many of our young men had shed blood. At the foot of the hill there was a spring. And sometimes men of the People's Army or the puppet army leaving their guns behind went down the hill to fetch water from the spring. And it seems both sides refrained from shooting on

such occasions, only to resume when the men went back to their side with water. Such was the tragic picture of the war that the American imperialists and the Syngman Rhee clique brought to the Koreans — a war in which Koreans had to kill Koreans!

On we went towards the north. When we were hungry we chewed azaleas. Soon we came to a signpost which told us that anyone passing beyond this line would be shot.

It was the puppet army's signpost and we knew the demarcation line was not too far off.

After the third night in the mountains, early in the morning Jung went out to scout about. The night was very difficult. We were starving and weak from exhaustion.

Shortly Jung returned to say that positively we were in North Korea already. To this, Pak and I cheered loudly. From now on we could walk in the daytime. Let us start right away. Suddenly a voice shouted.

"Halt! Who goes there?" It was the voice of a People's Army soldier. Pak San Il in a clear voice answered.

"Two South Korean students and one puppet army man have come over to North Korea."

Then we removed the army uniforms. Several People's Army men ran up to us. Wholeheartedly they welcomed us and carrying us on their shoulders they sang the "Democratic Youth League March."

Our escape was successful and we were now in North Korea.

From that moment on my life has been meaningful and full of hope. Everywhere we went people received us with kindness and friendship.

We have been receiving the best treatment one can think of.

We have been at Sokhoo and Songdan rest homes—two of the splendid rest homes for workers.

Under a Cabinet Ordinance we were given 20,000 *won* each. The ordinance provided special consideration for youth and students of South Korea who came to the North in opposition to the rule of American imperialists and the Syngman Rhee clique.

At present Pak San Il and I are studying at the Songdo Politictal Economy Institute and Jung Kyung Rok joined the glorious People's Army, as he wished.

The Government provides for us every month 3,300 *won* besides clothings, footwear, and school supplies. Under the tender care of the Government and in the midst of people's affection we are marching forward freely on the road of learning.

In Quest of New Life

Shin Hong Joon
Former 2nd Lt, Observation Officer,
35th Regiment, 5th Division of the ROK Army

IT WAS in January 1956.

Large flakes of snow had been falling for three days now, thickly blanketing the surrounding area. Watching the endlessly falling snow flakes, I became lost in thought. Such gloomy weather is apt to depress one. A cold and helpless feeling began to grip me again.

"What am I in the ROK army for?"

I tried to answer this serious question which constantly troubled me. Shaking my head, I closed my eyes. But I was soon awakened from my deep thought. A soldier was coming towards the observation post, crunching through the snow.

Suddenly he stopped short on his way and, looking around, hastily put something under the snow, then went inside.

Suspicious of his strange act, I asked him in a commanding tone, common to the ROK armymen.

"What were you doing outside there?"

"What do you mean, sir?"

At my question, the soldier turned pale.

"What is that you put under the snow?"

"I didn't put anything."

"What! I saw you! Go and bring it. Hurry up!"

The poor fellow went outside and soon came back with a handful of burnt rice. Now it was clear that he had stolen that stuff from mess hall to fill his empty stomach.

Seized with fear and awaiting the punishment he expected, he stood in front of me. I turned my eyes away from his panic-stricken face.

"Help yourself to it!" I ordered in a hoarse voice.

At my unexpected answer, he stared at me in wonder, tears starting to his eyes.

Gloom settled over me again. Hunger was not all the soldier was suffering. He was still in summer uniform in this bitter cold. Frost-bitten flesh was peeping out of his sleeves, while the U. S. made carbine rifle he carried was biting into his skinny body.

Recently I had heard that several "high officials of government" including the "Minister of Defence" were charged with having seized cotton for armymen's padded winter uniforms. This was why the soldiers were still in summer uniforms. I bit my lips to force down an outburst of wrath.

"Damn it!" I murmured to myself as my mind sought some kind of relief.

Snow was still falling, falling.

A little later, I spotted with my field-glass some people running hither and thither down at the foot of the mountain, some shouting, others rubbing their hands as if clapping and shaking their fists in the air. Something must have happened, I thought. I called to the soldier, who, by now, had eaten all the burnt rice.

"Hey! You go down to the foot of the mountain and see what has happened there. Hurry!"

After a while the soldier came back, his eyes blazing in his pale face.

"What's happened?" I asked him.

"The soldiers who had been sent out to make charcoal were all snowed under, and no one was sent to rescue them..." The soldier gasped out.

"What?" I asked, moving close to him.

"The soldiers who had been sent out to make charcoal..."

The horrified soldier seemed about to utter something. He stole a glance at me.

"How about the corpses? Have they dug them out?" I asked him in a low voice.

"The road to the mountain is blocked by snow... And they say the soldiers are already dead. So, it's not necessary to dig them out and bring down from the mountain..."

The soldier murmured to himself, clenching his fists.

Being aware of my presence, he made an awkward gesture as if repenting of what he had done. He knew that the slightest slip of a single word of complaint before an officer meant risking punishment. Everything around me was so appalling. I turned away and heaved a deep sigh.

In the ROK army, it had long been common practice for the commanding officers such as regiment, division and even corps commanders to put their men to making charcoal. Money from such an enterprise was entirely pocketed by them for their luxurious living. These soldiers had been snow-bound and had died there. And the bigwigs were drinking and having a grand time at the cost of the lives of their men. On that very evening when I went down to the mess hall, I saw an American adviser in coloured spectacles and some of these "bigwigs" driving off somewhere accompanying street girls.

When the pack of knaves were gone, it became quiet all around. The mess hall was dark and ominously still. I had no appetite for the meal. Irrepressible wrath and a feeling of loneliness were tormenting.

"What a worthless life this is!"

At last it stopped snowing. The next day the sun appeared in a greyish sky.

On the afternoon of that day, I found the whole regiment in a hubbub. I went out to see what was up. An officer was shouting at the top of his voice:

"Line up! Girl comforters have come, girl comforters. You must thank the division commander!"

The scene was revoltingly disgusting. They had forcibly recruited innocent girls and women in the countryside forcing them to serve the "ROK army" men and American soldiers as "comforters".

That evening I happened to drop into the mess hall, where I found a soldier sitting alone. He was staring fixedly at the ceiling.

"It's rather late, why don't you turn in?" I asked the soldier.

The soldier jumped up and gave a bitter look, his eyes revealing the hatred he felt. Though I understood that

soldiers hated officers, his wrathful eyes startled me.

"What's the matter with you? Have you anything to complain of?"

"My wife..." He stopped halfway and dropped his head.

"What's matter with your wife?" Though I asked him, I had a pretty good idea of what his disconnected words meant. His wife had been hunted down as a "comforter".

The soldier, who had managed for a moment to calm himself, sat down and gave vent to his pain and grief. I shared the indignation and grief with him.

"I can't put up with all these damned things. I must escape from this hell..." I was determined.

"But how and to where?" I rushed out onto the yard slamming the door. The half moon was shivering in the cold winter sky.

Days and months passed.

It was already May. With the day for the elections of "President" and "Vice-President" on May 15th drawing nearer, men and officers were prohibited from making a trip, either on personal and official business or to go on leave, and we were also strictly forbidden to read the newspaper. Political instructors kept on trying to persuade men and officers to vote in favour of Syngman Rhee and his follower Li Ki Boong.

One day, they devised the so-called "preliminary polling" in the ROK army. It was to rehearse the polling so that nobody could vote against Syngman Rhee in the real voting.

I couldn't vote for Syngman Rhee and Li Ki Boong. To vote for them meant staying longer in this disgusting army. I, as well as many other who voted against them, was arrested. They trumped up the "preliminary voting" in their attempt to detect "anti-Syngman Rhee elements".

We the "anti-Syngman Rhee elements" were put in a monkey-house and beaten black and blue. The American adviser in coloured spectacles often visited the prison.

"You are opposed to Dr. Syngman Rhee? Now we know you are Red. You intended to go over to the North, didn't you?" With blood-shot eyes and twisted lips, the scoundrel

tortured me. At last I fell unconscious. How long I lay unconscious I don't know. When I came to my senses, tears of resentment welled up to my eyes.

When sitting in the cell, all the past events rushed back upon my memory one after the other, standing out vividly like white buttons on black clothes.

In November 1953 I was pressganged into the army. It was shortly after Syngman Rhee had come back from Washington where he earned praise of the Americans for being an "intrepid man" by his loud cry"Give me weapons, then we'll fight". He concluded the "ROK-U.S. Mutual Defence Pact". As a result of his "mission", I was taken from the school to army barracks.

Three years passed. Being an intellectual, I was made an officer. Students like me, who were conscripted into army, were made officers. After that promotion I, as an observation officer, was transferred to a new post near the military demarcation line, where I gazed day and night toward the North. Bitter reminiscence haunted me all the time. No matter how I strove to forget all the cursed things, they were always floating before my eyes: big combat training for "march north" against our fellow countrymen in the North; and the American adviser's instruction that we should not let our hands tremble when killing people.

And at the same time, memories which soothed my agonizing mind would flash before my eyes: the pictures of Seoul on June 28, 1950 and in the following days; tankmen of the People's Army waving their hands to the citizens of Seoul; a People's Army man greeting an old woman; the whole city ringing with cheers; the city bustling with activity; the main street and other streets crowded with people; and a new life of the people. This picture had never been erased from my mind throughout the days of my service in the ROK army. "Why didn't I go to the North at that time?" I asked myself. But the next moment another thought struck me: "All right, it's not too late yet!" With this thought, I brightened up.

"Here I'm not far from the North." I made up my mind to wait the day of my release.

At last the day came. Several days after the Presidential

elections in South Korea, I was released from jail. And a few days later, on May 22nd, I succeeded in escaping from the hell of the ROK army. Along with Yu Ei Jung who was my orderly and soldier An Jai Man, I came over to the North.

At present I, together with many friends, am engaged in the building of a new, happy life.

My Escape

KOONG BYUNG HAK
Former engineer, Taijun Locomotive Yard

AT LAST I am home again!

I'm home! It seems everything, everyone is congratulating my homecoming to the land of peace — the northern part of the Republic. The songs of birds by the streams, the weeping willows on the river banks and even the two straight lines of rail, all looks beautiful and all seems to be rejoicing over my being home.

I was born in Inheung-ri, Soodong County, South Hamkyung Province. When the Korean war broke out, I was working in Kowon District as a train engineer's assistant. However, in the winter of 1950, when the People's Army made a temporary retreat, the enemy forces occupying this district forced me to go to the South with them when they fled.

From Hamheung I was taken to Pusan, where I was enrolled in a "National Army" training center, set up in the compound of a Pusan Textile Mill. After two weeks, I was assigned to the run between Yungchun and Andong, belonging to a railway regiment, attached to the U.S. Eighth Army. The railway regiment was in charge of transportation of U.S. military supplies.

In every possible way numerous South Korean railway workers hindered and sabotaged the movement of U.S. military supplies.

Whenever there was a chance, they let the trains stand in a depot for a long time, or if they could they threw away goods or crushed them under their feet. And neighbouring farmers sometimes came out to pick up some foodstuffs or pieces of clothing. It was not infrequent to drag half empty freight trains to Andong. At last the U.S. army authorities disbanded the railway regiment in October,

1951, and from then on they themselves ran the trains.

With this I became a wanderer in the street. It was a bitter winter, bad enough for the people who had regular dwelling places but much worse for the homeless. Without a lodging place or sometimes on empty stomach I roamed around. I was reduced to skin and bones and had nothing on my back to keep off the falling snow.

It was in the air that things were better in Taijun and I decided to try my luck over there. I found only the grim remains of the war destroyed Taijun. I managed to get a job at the engineering section of Taijun railway depot. But life was little better than in the "railway regiment" days. On a handful of cooked barley I had to run the train for fifteen hours every day. The night was dreadful, for I had no place to sleep. Little had been restored except a few shops. Despite the serious housing shortage the Syngman Rhee puppet regime demolished all the "box houses". They said those "boxes" were an eye sore to the Americans. The police came with labourers to tear down those "boxes" and made the inhabitants pay them for levelling their houses.

The citizens of Taijun who lost their dwelling places pitched tents at the foot of hills. Even for this they had to pay large sums.

In one of these tents I took up my lodgings while I was on my job through spring, summer and autumn. But my health began to give away and one of my legs got infected which kept me away several days from the depot.

"I think you need a vacation because you look so tired. Perhaps you should go to some place to rest." These were the words the chief uttered when I reported to work after my illness. So he asked me to go some place to rest. And he knew very well that I didn't even have a place to sleep. He fired me "nicely".

The following spring — two years after I left home — I went to Seoul.

Seoul was crowded with country folks driven away from the farms. Along the foot of Namsan Hill and in Todong and Yangdong districts they put up huts made of planks to maintain their miserable life. Their children went out

in the street to sell newspapers or shine shoes. Also children carried water for small money and sold iced candies. The parents worked as porters for meager pay. However, they could not sustain themselves and many committed suicide.

There were many restaurants and bars. Every night those places were converted into dins of riotous eating and drinking and vulgar tunes that mingled harshly with the cries of hungry children in the plank huts.

Three years have passed since I left my dear old village. The life of the past three years was like a horrible nightmare — a life of darkness, hunger, and fear. Liberty, rights and happiness looked so remote from my life. Yet I too had once enjoyed to my heart's content all of them — freedom, rights, and happiness in my old home town.

But in this place where darkness reigns and where the mighty police indulges in terrorist activities I was a complete beggar and slave. The harder my life became, the more I longed for the happiness I had tasted in my home town. How precious the happiness was and how good the people's power was!

Within me the desire to get away from all these became stronger. And I decided to make my escape to the bright land! The land of joy and happiness!

Many tales of attempted escape to the North were in the circulation. I heard that Han Jai Sook, a former Hamheung train engineer who was brought down to the South with me, was shot when he was caught in his attempt to cross over to the North.

But more and more young people of South Korea looked to the North and the number of people going over to the North increased steadily.

Whenever the news of an escape reached me, I could not help picturing my mother and father back home.

The Syngman Rhee henchmen in hope of dispelling such dangerous notions, as they put it, forced right and left all the young people into their army. Even disabled persons were dragged into it.

One day they grabbed me in Seoul and sent me to the Military Training Centre in Ronsan. After the training I was assigned to the Fifth Division, on mess duty as a private.

During my Ronsan days I heard of three or four desertions every month from a platoon. This happened so often that they recruited one thousand people for an 800 force, because they expected about 200 of the recruits would escape or drop off.

The punishment they inflicted in the Syngman Rhee's army was most barbarous. I had thought the Japanese method bad, but this was worse. They would pull out two people and order them to slap each other. Sometimes they were brothers or cousins. If the younger hesitated to hit his elder, Syngman Rhee men were there to show how it was done by making the soldiers bleed with beastly punches. If anyone cried out from agony or hatred against them, he would be cut up terribly.

My desire to get away from this "ROK army" life hardened, and I began to look for an opportuntiy. The best way was buying off the officers. There was nothing impossible with bribery. Since I was in the mess section it wasn't too difficult for me to make some money. I sold rice and other foodstuffs. This was very common practice in the Syngman Rhee's army, and they would call one a damn fool if he didn't know this trick. Some officers not only overlooked this practice to pocket some money, but actually asked a share in the deals.

At last I succeeded in swinging around an officer who gave me a discharge from the army as a disabled. I took my way back to Taijun again where I established my residence. Once out of the army I worked harder than ever to cross over to the North. But coming over to the North was not so easy and a very careful plan had to be worked out.

Much had been said by the U.S. and Syngman Rhee armed forces about rehabilitation and reconstruction but it was a mere fabrication. The Moonkyung Cement Factory and Inchun Glass Works which were to have been rebuilt by them right after the truce did not come true. In Seoul such large buildings as the Korean Bank, Central Post Office and the Hanchung Building were still in the disfigured state caused by the war. And Choongmoo Street was a heap of rubble. Since there wasn't any

rebuilding, the number of unemployed increased and the life of working people became more unbearable. The train engineers were getting a little better treatment, but with their earnings they could not make both ends meet.

Sometimes they let people aboard without tickets to collect fares later for themselves. Sometimes they would take spare parts and accessories of the train to the market to sell. And sometimes they would connive with traders to cash in on the coal and would stop the train and let the merchants take the coal. This practice was known to Syngman Rhee himself and he threatened engineers with a firing squad. But he could not put a stop to this. On the contrary this practice spread more widely, because people could not sustain themselves. But this was not the only reason; they did this to hinder the railway transportation.

South Korea is known for its numerous beggars. I was told by the "chief" of the beggars in Taijun there were some 450 registered beggars in the city of Taijun and many times that figure unregistered. Because there were so many they could not get anything to eat and consequently starved to death.

But people's life meant nothing to the Americans in South Korea. They brought in such impractical articles as cigarettes, nylon, matches, cosmetics, coffee, and candies under the label of relief goods. They set up a Yankee market to flood with American goods which was sold at exorbitant prices.

Consequently the domestic goods as such were driven out of the market, and many workers were unemployed because factories had to be closed.

The American lord it over South Korea. A case in point is the Railway Department. The U.S. army (RTO) supposedly returned the railway to Syngman Rhee but in reality not a single train ran without a nod from them.

The contempt the Americans have for the Korean people is beyond description. Without any reason they shoot people, and on trains a section is chalked off for "U.S. personnel". They are busy with their scheme to provoke another war, bringing in tanks, machine-guns, and other heavy weapons.

I could not bear to stay any longer in such a place. Whenever the news of crossing over to the North reached me, I became more eager than ever to go.

The truth of the matter is that the South Korean people earnestly long for North Korea. Particularly those who were taken to the South from the North. No one knows who wrote it but among the people from North Korea there is a song which runs like this:

"Tell me,
Can you see my home?
My home is in the North.
My young wanderer,
What can you see
From the top of the hill?
Wipe away your tears,
And tell me,
Can you see my home?
My dear home in North!"

Of course, these people long for their homes. They want to come home for they are tired of the fascist rule of the U.S. imperialists and the Syngman Rhee clique, and because they long for the system practised in North Korea, which is for the welfare of the people.

Gradually people in South Korea are beginning to see that such rule of force in South Korea is destined to failure and people cannot survive under it.

I managed to become the chief of the South Choongchung Province Agency of a weekly, which had the circulation of about 1,500. The paper itself was not much but through this I secured my identification card. There are a few musts in South Korea if one wants to move about. First of all one needs a good backing, money, and smart looking attire. Then he needs an identification card. When he is fortified with all these musts — he is in. But the most important is a good backing. Anyway one has to have all these. Should anyone of them be missing, no one can be sure what will happen to him. And if he is a young fellow, chances are very likely that he will be caught and forced into the army.

At long last, May 26, 1956, I left Taijun. Everything

worked out smoothly. On June 6, in the darkness of night I started towards the North from a position about five miles from the demarcation line.

I kept on the highway about three miles and then started to skirt the foot of a hill. I was in the demilitarized zone. I tip-toed, lest I make any noise, then all of a sudden a figure loomed up about 100 metres away. The black shadow seemed to flatten itself to the ground and I, too, automatically went down to the ground.

A long time, it seemed, I waited holding my breath. I started to crawl to a little different direction to avoid any danger. It must have been some sort of beast, I don't know. It was quiet all around and no sign of any human being. I stood up, and ran, ran towards the North. The faster I ran, the more strength I seemed to gather.

I signalled to a People's Army man to whom I explained everything. He was very kind and took me to his lodgings.

For the first time in six years I slept a peaceful night. When I woke up, I found the whole room was filled with bright sunlight.

Time passed. Now I hold a lever in my hand driving trains throughout this beautiful land of ours—the land of happiness! What joy to work and toil in the land where happiness blossoms, and the system is good. I am happy in the bosom of my land, our land.

The Turning-Point of My Life

JUN JUNG SOO
Former 1st Class Sergeant
of the Communication Unit,
1st Battalion, 36th Regiment,
5th Division of the ROK Army

A SENSE of excitement went through me. A turning-point of my life was at hand. For a moment I was tense not knowing exactly what to do—just kept looking at the stars in the southern sky under which my dear mother lived. "We better hurry, Sergeant!" The voice of private Li Yoon Hi brought me to my feet.

Then I went into our tent to prepare myself for the trip. I was very careful not to miss a single item a ROK Army man would carry, first of all, my identification card. Before coming out of the tent I put on the quilted underwear that mother had sent me. Seeing me Li said: "Sergeant, we have to go to the O.P. (Observation Post). It's already 10 o'clock." As he was saying this, we reached the stream which flows from Mt. Hyangro. He jumped the stream ahead of me and stretched out his hand to help me cross the stream. Saying to myself this was the first test to prove whether or not I was fit to do what I was intending to do that night, I jumped over the stream lightly.

We kept on along the stream for some time before reaching the designated spot. This was the point where I had to set my course for the night. Because at this point we must turn to the right to reach the O.P., without realizing it, I stopped and looked back towards our barracks. I could see my buddies dancing by the lamp light.

"Hey! Sergie, are we lost?" Li nervously asked me.

"No, of course not! We must keep to the left. I know the way."

Pretending I did not see the road to the O.P., I led him to the left. We kept on about 200 metres, crossing the

stream a couple of times. Sometimes we stumbled over rolling stones in the darkness.

"Boy! This is really tough going. I am sorry, Sergeant. We have to go through all this. I guess we should have waited until morning."

He complained as though he were sorry for me.

"I know it is a tough going. But certainly we cannot go back!"

Not that it was easy to reach the O.P., the road was truly rough. I was sure no one had ever trodden these paths. I could not help asking myself why the road we traversed in life had to be so hard. I asked Li:

"Look, Yoon Hi! It seems we are going on endlessly. Going and going! Do you know where we are headed for?"

"Yeh! You should like my geography teacher," answered Li recovering himself. He then almost lost his footing.

"What about your geography teacher?"

"In the midst of geography class, looking far out of the window, he used to say something like what you've just said."

"What?"

"He used to say we people keep going all the time. Many keep going until their death without knowing what freedom and happiness mean. Then there are some who courageously brave every obstacle and rugged passage towards peace and happiness."

"Mm! That's pretty good!"

It was so unreal in the deep mountains and in the pitched darkness that someone should be telling me such profound thoughts. I looked around as though to identify the source of such noble thoughts. The moon was almost hidden, and the stillness was overwhelming. Only now and then was heard the hoot of an owl.

"You know what? I bet we've walked thousands of miles since we were born."

"Of course."

"But do you know where we've come to?"

"I don't know, but we are still human beings, I guess. But we have come to such a point that we cannot utter

even one word even though we are treated like a horse or ox."

We rounded ridge after ridge along the stream, which became narrower as we went on. We came to a gorge where the thick forest covered the sky. I knew on the top of the cliff stood the O.P.

"Do you know where we are?" I asked Li who was right behind me.

"What do you mean? Aren't we going to the O.P.?" Li looked back as if he wanted to make sure of the path we were taking.

"Something must be wrong with me tonight."

"You mean we are lost?"

"Yah, I think so."

"Really?"

"I don't know what to do."

"Gee! Gosh! You are not feeling well either."

"No! I don't think I can walk any more."

"I wonder if there is a short cut."

"I think I know the general direction. But I don't see how we can go over those cliffs. It was bad enough to come this far. The other side is the enemy-line."

"What? Enemy side?"

"Yeh, I think so."

"Gosh! What are we going to do?"

"We'll be alright. As your geography teacher said there are some who courageously brave every obstacle in one's life."

Li helped me to a flat rock by the water and then took a deep breath.

"Don't you feel like washing your face, Sergie? You might feel better," Li said. I felt awfully tired and my head was in swim.

"You go ahead. I don't think I would like cold water." I said as I stretched myself on the rock. Li put down his carbine and took off his cap. Then I heard him splashing. The moon showed her face as if she was looking into our innermost hearts.

October 8th, 1956! This is the night when I had to make a decision that would seal the fate of my future.

I looked at the hill once more, which I had marked the other day when I was on the O.P. duty. It was a stiff hill stretching out from the cliff where the O.P. stood. The fateful hill! Could I climb over the hill safely? If I were caught, my head would be honeycombed with bullets. How could I make Li Yoon Hi who knew nothing about my intentions climb over the hill? I was tense and nervous. Should I tell what I intended to do? The answer was no. He might think as I did but he might not agree with me on what I was planning to do. I decided I would explain to him when we reached our destination. But, how could I lead him to the hill? No good thought came to my mind.

He finished washing his face. Wiping it with a towel he came over and sat by me.

"How do you feel?"

"No good. My head is splitting . . . But I'll be alright."

"Gee, I'm sorry. You have fever? A cold towel might help you."

"I told you I'll be alright," I said pretending I did not want to be bothered. Without saying anything Li kept looking at me for several minutes, then lit up a cigarette.

"Give me a smoke."

"Yah, sure."

After a long inhalation I watched the sky. Flocks of black clouds were drifting by. Now and then moonbeams pierced the thick clouds as if to brighten my heavy hearts.

Why this night did I choose to climb over the hill that all the guns and eyes were focussed on? I knew I was at a crossroad, where I should make a solemn decision between dark and light. I knew it was the moment that I should make a decision on my future by thinking and action. Affection towards my parents and brothers who were going through such suffering in our native village and my bitter ROK Army life came back to my mind. My heart felt heavier.

I've come from Toduk village, Kwangsan County, South Chulla Province, deep in the south. By now in our dear home village persimmons are tinged orange and chestnuts are to be picked. But would my folks—poor teanant

farmers— taste any? Only landlord's appetite will be stimulated. I can picture fields after fields stretching in front of the village, rippling with golden waves of rice crops. By now there must be piles of rice here and there — the fruits of farmers' sweats through the long months of spring and summer. But I asked myself: "Would any of the farmers get any rice at the end of the hard working day?" They will go home empty-handed. Among them I saw my father and mother who were bent with age. Both of them passed seventy. I also saw the landlords and policemen vexing the tenants with some fifty different taxes and what not.

My parents in their life of seventy years had nothing but misery, hunger and shame. They raised six children. Already three daughters were married and I, the older son, was forced into the cursed South Korean National Army, when I was 19 years old, after my graduation from the primary school. With two younger brothers they were trying to eke out a scanty livelihood.

But one day a happy life came to them. August 1950! The People's Army in their pursuit of the fleeing U.S. and Syngman Rhee armies liberated my home village. My father and mother danced with tears in their eyes when they were given the land under the people's power.

But before a month was out the People's Army had to make temporary retreat. And the old life of darkness, shame and poverty came back to them. Even during my last furlough when I visited the folks, I've heard my dear parents still talking fondly in whispers about the People's Army.

For six years I have been wearing a uniform of the "national army" as "protector" of the Syngman Rhee regime, which brings only hunger and oppression to my family. How shameful my life has been! And I was beaten like a dog.

It is loathsome even to think of it. It was in June, 1953 when I joined the army. Later I was transferred to a unit under Commander Li Suk Pong of the Communication and Signal Corps.

I, a sergeant then, was in charge of installations. The

commanding officer Li Suk Pong was the devil himself. One time I was his personal "liaison man", which meant his personal servant. I had to prepare his meals, and wash his clothes. Not infrequently he threw the whole table at me if there was something he didn't like. Often he cut up his laundered clothes with scissors if they were not properly ironed. Sometimes I could not iron them because I was too busy. On these occasions he made me pay a fine. Out of my meager salary I had to buy seasoning stuff to make his meals tastier, and to replace his cut-up cloth.

In March, 1956 our division was stationed in Inje County, Kangwon Province, near the demarcation line. A platoon of fifteen men was dispatched to a forward position about 20 miles distant to prepare some installations. The commander ordered to lead the platoon. The work was very simple, and soon all the communication installations were put in order. Then we had very little to do.

That we did not have much to do would not escape Li Suk Pong's attention. One evening I was called into his quarters. He pretended to be very friendly and kind.

"Look, you are two years older than I," he said.

"But you have had a tough time on account of me."

"That's all right. It wasn't so tough. Only I'm sorry I could not please you more." Taking a long puff with a smile on his face he took out a notebook out of his pocket.

"Look, Chung Soo. You know very well your men just cannot sit around. We've got to do something. Who knows, perhaps you men can eat beef or pork if you work."

"What do you mean?"

"You know, I went up to the Division Headquarters last night. And they gave me good dope."

"What was that, sir?"

His face lit up and in jovial tone he continued.

"I was told that you can make a lot of money by collecting herbs or scrap iron. They say a pound of peony roots will bring in 5,000 hwan."

"5,000 hwan, sir?"

"Yah! That's right. And that's not all. You know there

are hundreds of thousands of empty shells. Each of them will give us a hundred hwan. A pound of wire is a hundred hwan, a handful of barbed wire a thousand hwan, used alminium 800 hwan for about six pounds. For an old automobile engine you can get 20,000 hwan. And guess how much you can get for crushed airplane."

"A crushed airplane?"

"Yah! It will make us rich by 200,000 hwan. Just think, 200,000 hwan!"

My boss, carried away by his figures, excitedly went on.

"So, I wanted to ask you how you would feel about this. Since your man have little to do, if you make them collect whatever they can — just think what would happen?"

"If this is your order, sir."

"This is not an order. But a sort of welfare work."

"I understand, sir."

"I knew you would. Mind you any sort of old thing will do. But, hmm — an old engine, oh — a fuselage!"

"We'll find everything that we can."

"I know you will. Good luck!" As he was saying this he got all heated up and grabbed my hand and gave me a good shake. I guess he didn't know what he was doing.

At any rate, I with my platoon men, as ordered, went in search of herbs and empty shells and what not for a month. We walked through villages and ransacked mountains and valleys. No engines and fuselage were to be found. But the stuffs we collected netted Li Suk Pong some 300,000 hwan.

Of course, he was not too happy, because we did not find him any engine or fuselage. But 300,000 hwan was no little sum to him. He could not conceal his grin.

He "humbled" himself to shake hands with each member of the platoon. Of course, he did not fail to utter his displeasure over not having an engine or fuselage. Neither beef nor pork was in our chow as promised, but he was awfully busy with the money.

Every day he went to the nearby village where the Division Headquarters was to indulge in wine and women. But the money did not last too long and at the end he was infected with venereal disease. To all this nobody dared open his mouth.

My life of misery, sorrow and humiliation continued. Sometimes I could not fall asleep because of homesickness and my hard life. I felt like crying on dreary rainy nights. Summer slipped by and the fall was more lonely.

My boss, out of money, kept very much to his room. One day he was called to the Division Headquarters and did not come back until dusk. No sooner had he sat down at the table than he sent for me. When I entered his room I noticed a wine bottle on his table which had been absent for sometime. He asked me to sit by him and offered me a glass. I was surprised. And I knew he was up to something. Apparently he noticed my inquiring look. Trying to escape my eyes he lit a cigarette and said nervously:

"You know I wanted to do this for a long time. I wanted to have a long talk with you over a glass of wine. But here it is already autumn."

"Certainly, the time flies by, sir."

I didn't want to drink and put down the glass on the table.

"What's the matter? Go on, and drink it! This is your drink I am offering you".

"I am sorry but I have a little head-ache. If you have something to tell me, please do, because I would like to be excused if you don't mind." I told him this because I wanted to get away from his room. Looking a bit jittery, he said:

"Gee, that's too bad. I wanted to have a long talk with you tonight. Do you want me to call a medic?"

"Thanks, I'll be alright. I'll see him on my way out."

"You'd better take care of yourself."

By this time I knew all his "kindness" and "friendship" meant that he wanted something of me. Must be he is going to ask me to make some more money for him.

"By the way", he continued. "You know I was at the Division Headquarters this morning. I hear there is a little hill called Hyang Peak about six or seven miles away to the east from here."

"Yes, sir. I was there once."

"Good! I hear that mountain is full of pine-nuts."

"Pine-nuts, sir?"

"Yah, just full of them. All you need to do is to rake'em in. So I think if you and your men are mobilized to pick up pine-nuts we can all share together. Then, of course, we can present some to Regiment Commander and Divisional Commander. I'm sure they'll be pleased."

I was right. He was short of cash and needed money very badly. He wanted to do some pine-nuts business, because pine-nuts were almost as dear as rice. I wanted to ask him what had happened to the 300,000 hwan we made for him last time but I couldn't. I was rather glad over the prospect that I didn't have to see this devil even one day. So I asked him:

"How long do you think we would need for this job?"

"Huh, I knew you would like the idea. And I knew I could depend on you. Let's try about five days or so, and see what happens. If one person picks up about 15 pounds a day, easily 150 pounds could be collected if ten of you work. It'll make 750 pounds in five days. Then perhaps your men can work ten days or even a full month."

"Yes, sir! I understand. Tomorrow is the first of October, so I'll try about five days at first."

Next morning our platoon set out early in the morning with provisions, cigarettes and camping tents. Of course, we did not forget to carry a few sacks to bring back pine-nuts for my boss. It was around noon when we reached the Hyang Peak.

It was about two kilometres from an Observation Post over the demarcation line. We put up tents, then had lunch. Right after lunch we began collecting pine-nuts. There were ten of us. We covered every gorge and valley but all we could do was only about 45 pounds. And it was getting dark already. The following day we started out at dawn. But again we could not do more than 45 pounds by noon. First of all, the mountain was not full of pine-nuts as my boss thought, and it was still too early to pick pine-nuts. They weren't quite ripened yet. I felt I should report to him about this situation. So I sent two men with 45 pound pine-nuts each and asked them to explain everything to him. They came back right away and told me he wanted me to report back to him at once.

"Why? Do you know?"

"We don't know. We told him everything but all he said was he wanted to see you at once," one of them said with a worried look.

Losing no time I reached his place. With a fierce look he kept staring at me for some moments, then abruptly ordered me to bring a stick. I guessed he was not pleased about the amount of pine-nuts we'd collected. He had no money for wine and women, and he decided to take it out on me. I had no choice but to bring a stick. And as was customary on such occasions I flattened myself on the floor.

So he started to beat me. One, two, three... he kept on. Somehow I was trained to bear up this kind of whipping. But when I counted twenty I felt all my bones were breaking into bits. My head began to reel. I lost my count and lost consciousness.

When I came to, I found myself in a hospital bed. Someone was massaging my body and a medic was putting some sort of injection in my arm. I thought I had came back from death. Gradually I knew there were three men rubbing my broken body. I murmured to myself, "How did I get here?".

Some would die just from what I experienced! But I said to myself people should not die like a dog. At no time did I ever feel a stronger will to live. A messenger came into my room to tell me my boss wanted to see me. Being helped by friends I barely made his room.

"You got whipped today. But you know why. So, tell me honestly why I beat you."

"Perhaps, not enough pine-nuts..."

I started to answer.

"Really, I never dreamed you would do anything like that."

"Sir, it is the whole truth. There are not so much pine-nuts and most of them are still not ready to be picked."

"Shut up! You don't put up any kind of excuse to your superior's order."

"But, sir, that is the truth! I wish you come there once to have a look for yourself."

"No excuse. I know damn well you plan to sell them

for yourself," as he was saying these words his stick landed on my shoulder again.

I lost my balance and fell on the table. Several minutes lapsed in silence. Then he was starting all over again. Only this time in a gentler voice.

"I'm sorry about all this. But how could you do a thing like that to me. You and I have for the past several years been serving together 'the Republic of Korea' and 'the Honourable President Syngman Rhee'. And you know very well who made you a sergeant and platoon leader. You could not have done what you did if you remembered all that I have done for you. Now, remember, we should never be without conscience!"

Being in pain I could not catch every word he was saying. His voice buzzed from far like a demon's whisper.

"So you should not think ill of me just because I whipped you today. It was all for your good. I want you to go back now and do an honest job. Bring me back 750 pounds of pine-nuts. And don't think I would forget you either."

Now he was rubbing my shoulder.

I do not remember how, but before I knew it I was at the ammunition post, and 14 bullets were in my hand. Just like a lightning, a thought passed through my mind. One of these will do the trick. Everything will be over. I felt much lighter and in lively steps started out for Hyang Peak where my men were.

Coming upon a deep valley I hastened my steps. Silence was all around me, only to be broken by lonely cries of pheasants. Under an ageless pine I sat down. The grass was very soft. I took out my note-book and started to write a letter to my father and my mother. When I finished writing, I took out my gun.

I had been beaten almost to death by him, because I could not bring him enough pine-nuts. And surely he'll kill me this time if I fail. So, why should I give him the satisfaction? I can do away with myself like a man. My finger was on the trigger and my gun was pointing at my head. All of a sudden someone hit my arm, knocking the gun to the ground. Startled, I looked around. There stood one of my men.

"Why did you stop me?"

"But, Sergie! If you are not around, what would happen to us?" As he was saying he wept, putting his arms around me.

"You should not have stopped me. Because you don't understand."

"But, Sergie! I do understand."

He was searching for pine-nuts and happened to find me. I felt very sorry for him and a strong affection which I had not experienced before came over me. I, too, put my arms around him and felt the bond of comradeship was sealed between us. Never before had I sensed love towards fellow human being as I did then. In detail I told him the whole story — how Li Suk Pong beat me.

Eventually, we returned to our tent. Apparently the men knew I would be cut up by the boss. Every one of them looked gloomy as I entered. I thought to myself, "How could I die leaving these men behind?" I told them:

"You boys don't have to worry a thing about pine-nuts any more. How can you pick them when there is none? I'll get all the blame when we go back. So you boys take it easy. This is nice place to rest."

None of the men said anything but all just kept looking at me. Young Li Yoon Hi must have noticed that I was very tired. He prepared the bed and helped me to go in. Once I was in bed, every muscle and each bone pained. I stayed in bed three or four days.

During my sickness one of the men took my place and led the squad after pine-nuts. Day in and day out they searched the mountains high and low, but they barely collected 15 pounds a day. It was far from what the boss wanted. As the time passed the more nervous they became.

Fearing that I would try to shoot myself again, the men saw to it that one of them stayed behind with me as a "cook". But one day every one of them went out without leaving anyone behind. They were, I guess, sure that I would not commit suicide. So I was alone. I still felt very weak, but I got out of bed, and came out of the tent. The autumn sun was very warm. I sat on the grass and looked up the sky. The day was clear and not a single cloud was

to be seen. And the air was refreshing. The fall was blazing along the murmuring clear stream, and the Hyangro Peak was mirrored in the water. Here and there birds were chattering.

Oh! What a beautiful land this is! This is my beloved fatherland! But why do we people have such unjust, ugly life here! How is it possible for a man to violate his fellow man's freedom and rights and treat him like a horse or ox? And beat him like animal? Who gave him all these wicked rights to commit such injustice to his fellow man? Perhaps a God? I do not know the answer.

Why is it a creature like Li Suk Pong soils this beautiful land of ours like a hungry wolf? His paws soaked in blood are tearing up innocent, young people!

One thing was sure to me. A creature like Li Suk Pong was a wolf in man's skin. So is the Syngman Rhee regime and their national army. And I knew their masters — the American imperialists — are the allied animals.

All of a sudden it occured to me there was an O. P. about two kilometres from here. I stood up and started to walk in that direction. Walking was painful but I kept on. Since I had been there once during the past spring when we were out for installation work, it was easy for me to find the way. I passed through a valley and kept along a little hill. No squad member was to be seen. At last I reached the restricted area.

"Who goes there?" A sharp voice challenged me. It was a guard. I shouted: "You damn fool! Don't you know who I am?"

The guard putting down his gun came toward me.

"Oh! So sorry, Sergeant. You were here last spring with the communication boy."

The guard even tried to greet me with a big grin.

"You better be careful when you shout at people."

"Yes, I know! I'm awfully sorry."

"Is the squad around?"

"Sure, Sergeant." He brought the squad leader with him losing no time. The squad leader whom I knew slightly before greeted me.

"Hello, Sergeant! I'm certainly glad to see you. What brings you here?"

"What do you mean? You mean to say I am a stranger here?"

"Oh, no! I didn't mean that. Of course, you are welcome here."

"How is my friend the communication man?"

"You mean Yim?"

"Yah, how is he doing?"

"Oh, he is doing fine. He is a very fine communication man."

"Sure, he is a good man. Otherwise we wouldn't have sent him to you."

"Of course not! After all this is a most forward position." There came my man Yim Yong Chai running.

"How are you?"

"Fine, fine! How is everybody?"

"Alright. Is everything going alright with you?"

"Yes, what brings you here, today?"

"Oh, I just wanted to see how you were doing."

"Let's go inside." The squad leader joined him saying: "Sergeant, please come in!"

Then he led me into the Observation Post.

The O.P. was built in a trench with openings all round. These are for guns and look-outs. I looked outside through one of the holes. My heart began to pound. For I felt there was a brighter world outside this dark, miserable trap. Hiding my excitement I asked Yim:

"Where are the enemy positions?"

"Why Sergeant? You know very well that you are not supposed to ask such questions." The squad leader sharply interjected.

"What?" With that I boxed him even though I knew the regulations very well.

"Do you know whom you are addressing? Where the hell did you get that stuff?"

"No, sir! What I meant was —"

"Think before you open your big mouth."

"I'm —"

"Shut up! What the hell do you think I came here for? For a picnic?"

"I'm awfully sorry, sir!"

"So tell me how far it is to the enemy position."

"Yes, sir. Do you see the ridge across the river? That's it. It's about three kilometres." Then he went on to tell me in detail the deployment of enemy forces and mined areas. He even offered me some cookies. As if charmed by a magic power I kept looking at the northern land stretching out in front of my eyes. "What a bright world it was!" I thought.

On my way back to the tent from the O.P. I again came upon the ageless pine, where I wanted to do away with myself a few days ago. But this day, it seemed, there were so many things to think about. I sat, and thought and thought. Before I knew it, the western sky was aflame with the setting sun. Suddenly fluttering of a dove broke the silence. The dove flew away as if to a free land.

Wish I had wings like the dove! There was only one way left open for me. Get away from this hell! When I reached the tent, it was already dark and I found all the men were still in gloom. Some were lying on the grass staring at the stars, some fastened their eyes upon the ground with both hands clutching their hair. Dejection was all around. I saked:

"Did you boys have supper?"

"How could we? We thought something had happened to you." Answered Private Yun Kyong Soo.

"What d'ya mean? Did you guys figure I'd run away or do something?"

"Sure we figured something had happened to you."

"I think you guys are worrying too much. I wouldn't just die like that. Now, snap out of it, all of you. It's getting chilly and we can stand one or two drinks."

"I'm telling you, Sergie. Don't give us another fright like today, please! Now go inside and lie down."

I gave them some money to get wine, then went inside the tent.

Private Li Yoon Hi with a big grin on his face went to a neighbouring village to get wine and the cook got busy

preparing something to eat. The atmosphere became a little more cheerful. The bonfire they built with fagots gave out a nice warmth. Someone started humming and everyone joined in singing "Arirang". It sounded gentle and tender.

Without realizing it, I found myself staring outside the tent. Against the darkness the face of each man came into life by the glowing fire. Whatever the cook was preparing did not rouse my appetite. Their songs echoed their homesickness. Sometimes they sounded as if they were lamenting their youth which they were fiddling away in the miserable "National Army". Who would say they do not aspire after a descent life and freedom — these young men with burning zeal like the bonfire and with conscience?

Then, how could I leave them and take the path alone by myself? Would they act with me this night? I wish they would! How wonderful it would be! There must be, I am sure there is some who would understand and agree with me. I wanted to run to the men and tell everything. But I restrained myself and lay down. It was too risky.

Along the demarcation line if any person was reported to the authorities as having knowledge of the North, the informer will be rewarded with 10,000 hwan. Many turned to be dogs in order to grasp money. I refused to believe any of my men would turn out like that. But, at the same time, I could not say with certainty that no harm would come to me if my plan was known to many. I shivered at the thought if I was caught they would put shells right into my head as the leader of the group, and the men would rot away in dungeons.

After much thought I decided to "trick" Li Yoon Hi into coming along with me. I felt sorry for him. He was just a kid who had not yet taste the real Syngman Rhee's army life. He should have been in school.

Outside, the singing of Arirang had changed into another song by now. Somehow the songs they sang tonight were doleful. Some tunes broke my heart and some seemed to give me "wings" to fly over to the world of freedom.

Triumphantly Private Li who had gone to buy drink charged in with a few bottles. Everyone became animated.

The cook spread out the blankets by the fire and brought out the food. Presently one of the men came into the tent.

"Sergie, we have some wine and the supper is ready."

Hurriedly I wiped away my tears and cheerfully I said:

"Come on, boys! Let's have a drink!

All the men sat in a circle, and poured the wine in their cups. They were gay. But they could not hide their inner feelings. Very little was said. At last young Private Li without taking away his eyes from his cup said in a heavy tone:

"Sergie, I'm telling you, we are really sad this evening."

"What's the matter? Homesick?"

I tried to be cheerful and change the subject.

Li Yoon Hi lifted his cup in an excited manner. His voice was trembling.

"Sure, everyone gets homesick . . . But this kind of thing shouldn't happen to any man. I don't care who it is. Nobody — not even a God-damn superior — has right to beat up anyone, particularly his inferiors, like a horse or ox. I would revenge for you if I was even one grade higher than the boss, but when will I be an officer?" I knew he had never taken strong drink before. But he tossed off his glass. With dry coughs he turned around.

I drained my cup. I didn't have much appetite but I tried to eat as much as I could as a long night was ahead of me. However, the men kept drinking on their empty stomach as though they wanted to drink down their woes. They touched little food. Before long all felt the effects of wine. Some sang, some danced and some drummed their rice bowls to the dancing. There was one sitting in the corner, looking at the moon. Some were on their feet shaking their clenched fists towards the headquarters where the boss was and pouring out curses at him. The whole valley resounded with the echoes. I sat there and just kept watching. Presently Li Yoon Hi, who had been watching me, came over and sat down beside me. Evidently he felt the effect of his first drink. His face was flushed and he was getting short of breath.

"Sergie, you wanted me to go to the O.P. with you. Are you still going? It's getting very late."

I felt his penetrating eyes as though trying to search my innermost thoughts. I was little surprised. I said very calmly, "Of course."

I could hardly control myself by the thought that this would be the last evening with my men. Perhaps after this night I would not see them again. The pity I felt for them gripped me. But what had to be done had to be done. With Li Yoon Hi I started out.

I could not fall asleep. The moon had already sunk in the west and the night air was chilly. Poor Li Yoon Hi, who kept watchful eyes over me, overcame by fatigue, had fallen asleep. He was holding the gun firmly in his sleep. Suddenly he muttered something, turned over and put his arms around my neck. He must have been cold. It touched me so! What a pitiful soul! Surely, I would lead him to a new world where liberty and happiness were awaiting us. Lest I wake him, I removed his hand and stood up. I took off my jacket and put it over him. Puffing at my cigarette a few times I went over everything to myself. Before long dawn would break. How could I make the youngster come along with me over the hill? All of a sudden there was a voice.

"Sergie, I know a place that is full of pine-nuts!"

"What?" Poor lad, even in his dreams he was worrying about pine-nuts!

The word pine-nuts swiftly took me back to the Li Suk Pong. The devil too must be saying in his dreams "more pine-nuts . . . This ain't enough!"

Dawn began to break. And the darkness was losing its grip. Shortly the sun will pierce through this darkness.

Impatiently I woke Li. The chap mumbled something but soon got up.

"It is morning already," I said.

"Gosh, I must have fallen asleep. I'm sorry, Sergie." Noticing my jacket over him he felt a little shy. He jumped to his feet and handed me over my coat.

"I guess we'd better get going," I said I was putting on my jacket.

"Do you feel any better, Sergeant?"

"Yah, I feel much better. I guess the sleep did me some good," I said, even though I had not had a wink.

"You said last night you knew a place with many pine-nuts."

"What? What pine-nuts?"

"But you told me so." Li kept silence for a few minutes and burst out laughing.

"Oh, that! I must've been talking in my dream."

"Yah, I know. I bet the guy, I mean the boss, too, is saying 'pine-nuts', 'pine-nuts' in his dream."

"I don't doubt. By the way, Sergie, I went up to the bluff over here while you were sleeping. You know what? The place is full of blessed pine-nuts."

"What d' you mean? That's no place for pine-nuts."

"Could I help it! It was so in my dream."

"Alright! That's enough of your dream. I tell you something. The pine-nuts are plentiful beyond the hill, over there."

"Over there! Did you say, Sergie?"

"That's what I said. Not only pine-nuts but plenty of apples too to be picked."

"Come, sir! You are dreaming, too!"

"No, I'm not."

"But, Sergie, you know very well that is the enemy territory over there."

"I know very well, but don't you feel like going over there once?"

"What for?"

"So you are scared, yeh?"

"But, Sergent. How do you propose to go into an enemy territory to pick fruits and return safely?"

"I know how. After all you don't think I spent six years in the army for nothing."

"Yeh, but..."

"Don't you remember we were here last spring for installation work? Already then I've studied this region carefully."

"Really?"

"After all we are going to visit with Yim Yong Chai,

one of our communication men, stationed at the O.P. We must bring something to him."

"That would be fine, but —" my companion was still unconvinced.

"I'm telling you everything would be alright. You just follow me. I wouldn't be able to bring back too much if I go alone. So you better come along with me. Then the boys at the O.P. would be tickled to see us."

"May be! But I don't know."

"My God! I didn't know you were so chicken-hearted."

"But, I'm not!"

I guessed he didn't like to be called chicken-hearted. He followed me with lively steps.

It was not quite bright yet but we could follow the pass through the thick forest across the stream. At last we came to the foot of the hill.

My young companion was following me without saying much, and all of a sudden he spoke out, bending to avoid the low hanging pine branches.

"Say, Sergeant!"

"What?"

"They say if we go to North Korea, the Reds'll chop our heads off. Do you think it's true?".

"I don't know. I've never been there. But I don't see how people kill just like that."

"But that's what they say. I don't know what to believe!"

"By the way, why do you ask that?"

"Nothing particular. I just wanted to know. Just between you and me, did you hear that . . .?

"What?" I quickly asked.

Li Yoon Hi caught his breath and in a rather measured tone said:

"I heard from a wire operator of the company."

"What did you hear?"

"Last month, one from our regiment and another soldier named Li Chang Koo, from Su Saik regiment went over to North Korea with field glasses and strategic maps, I heard."

"I heard that too. And I understand another soldier named Chun Pyung Sang of the Fourth Platoon, First Company, jumped over to North while he was on field duty."

"My friend, the wire operator, tells me..."

"Whom do you mean?"

"I'm sorry, Sergeant! But I can't tell you who it is. Anyway, according to this fellow, people who had gone to North Korea made radio broadcasts. And the things they say, he tells me, are out of this world."

Of course, I heard a number of such broadcasts. But I didn't know my young companion also had. Naturally, never did I speak of these programmes to anyone. Pretending I knew nothing I asked him:

"So, what did they say exactly?"

"But Sergeant, you mustn't tell anybody that I've told you."

"Of course not! What do you take me for?"

"The people who had gone over said that they got very good treatment. And everything was well provided for. Not only that. They can go to school and study whatever subject you like. And after they graduate from school, they work in the fields of history, philosophy, literature or industry according to their specialization. They say, they can work freely. Do you think it's true, Sergeant?"

"They couldn't be lying if they said these things over radio in person."

"I know, but I wonder..."

"Hush..."

"What's wrong, Sergeant?"

We were near the top of the hill and our fate depended on whether or not we were to climb over the hill safely.

"Be quiet!"

"What is the matter?"

"Don't you see the O.P. is right on the hill over there?"

"Yah, I see it. It is on a very high place, isn't it?"

"That's right."

"I bet it is about 300 meters from here."

"I imagine so."

"If we had known this last night, we should have come then."

"But this is a restricted area."

"Then, what are we going to do?"

"So we have to make our trip without being noticed by them. Otherwise, we shall be in an awfull fix."

"Perhaps we shouldn't have come after all. We don't have to have apples," my young companion looked very uneasy. So I said:

"Yah, but we cannot go back now! I'll tell you what we should do. I will run over first and hide myself under the bushes. And when the coast is clear I'll give you a signal by whistling. Then you come. I don't think it is a good idea to go two of us at one time."

"But Sergeant, what are we going to do when we return with pine-nuts and apples? It will be bright then."

"Don't worry! If we come back with plenty of pine-nuts and apples no one will make any fuss."

Evidently he was convinced by my assurance. His eyes sparkled with boyish adventurous spirit. We collected our nerves and ran toward the top of the hill. After about ten metres I slipped under the bush and watched the O.P. which stood out like eyes in a skeleton.

Suddenly a sharp voice broke the silence.

"Who goes there?" It was the voice from the Observation Post.

"Sergeant, what shall I do?" I could hear Li's voice coming from the other side of the hill. I answered back in a hushed voice.

"Hurry up! Run fast!"

Then I could see him at the top of the hill on his belly.

"I'll shoot, if you move!" was another shout from the O.P. I shouted back to Yoon Hi.

"Now we must run fast. Follow me!"

Then I started to run. I ran and ran! Stumbling, falling, I ran. I rolled over cliffs and my face was torn by the branches. No shots were heard. I thought my young companion was right behind me. When I reached the foot of the hill I slided under a bush. Still I could see a few dim stars in the sky. Holding my breath I waited. Not a sound was heard and no sign of Li Yoon Hi. I got up and looked

around, but still no sign of him. I called:

"Yoon Hi, where are you?"

I called and called, but no answer. There was no shot fired, so I was sure that nothing had happened to him. I repeatedly called. But only twittlings of morning birds echoed.

I wondered if he submitted himself when he was challenged. He must have been taken to the O.P. "Damn fool", I said to myself. I knew he didn't have guts. Almost I felt annoyed at his failure to follow me. But when I realized that he could not make the hill my heart was broken. To Li, the young chap, I wasn't fair. "I'm so sorry." I rebuked myself. Why couldn't I tell him everything? Didn't he tell me everything what he knew! About free, happy life in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. It wasn't he who was coward but it was I!

Had I told him everything, perhaps he would have gladly joined me. Perhaps he would have sat by me, and talked over our plans. I could picture his eyes sparkling! But he was not here with me.

If he was taken to the O.P., I imagined, he would be telling them that I had gone over to pick pine-nuts and apples. And at the end of the day when I didn't return, they would beat up the poor fellow to get the whole story!

But I knew that it was foolish to wait a whole day. Even then perhaps they were forcing Li Yoon Hi to lead them after me. Suddenly fear came over me. From tenseness I felt my tongue parched.

Through the bushes I saw a running stream. It may not be too deep but the currents were very swift. Then I heard at last the rolling stream over the rocks.

The water looked very inviting, and I wanted to drink to my heart's content. At this instance I wanted to jump across the river and run as fast as I could. But this place faced directly to the O.P., so I had to choose another path to escape their eyes.

I could not stay there and think too long, because there was a danger. They might be on my track. I began to inch on my belly under the bushes along the river. The rustling

stream could drown their footsteps if they were after me. I noticed that the bushes were rather tall here, so I couldn't be too sure of their mined areas. Even one false step could blow me to bits.

I kept along the stream some two kilometres. At this point the water rushed out thundering. The whole valley was shaking. It looked to me as if I were in a bad dream. All of a sudden in this desolate place images of human being came into sight. Ahead of me, three people, who looked almost familiar, were going along the stream. They had knapsacks on their backs. They were none other than men of the People's Army! Waving a handkerchief, I called loudly:

"You, there! Hello!" I kept calling but they evidently could not hear me. They didn't even look back.

They ought to hear me. How could they pretend not to hear me? The thundering sound of stream was deafening.

"What should I do?" I became panicky. I looked around beyond the bushes. I came a little further from the O.P. but it was still overlooking this region. My thirst was almost unbearable.

But this was no time to stop for a drink. I resumed my climbing, hidden under the bushes. My body and my senses were all numb.

But something pulled me on and I kept going. I did not remember exactly how long I was at this. But I could not move any more and I stopped. Now I saw my father's face. My gentle mother—her loving hands seemed to touch me. Yearningly I cried out "mother, father."

Who could be those people who were sitting on the rocks on the other side of the stream? They, too, looked somewhat familiar. I took out my handkerchief and waved towards them like mad. They failed to see me. I wanted to fire my gun to let them know. But it was too risky. And if I just fired a shot they might take me as an enemy. I held my gun over my head and discharged the gun. It was a signal to decide my future.

The people across the river stood up and beckoned me to come over. I jumped into water and went over to them. There were seven or eight of the People's Army men. An

officer came forward and embraced me as a brother. While I was in his arms I saw the faces of my father and mother. These were the people who had given freedom, rights and the land to my parents once. The officer received me most warmly. Little was exchanged, but our hearts joined. He treated me with brotherly kindness and the men offered me some bread and cigarettes.

"Water! Water!" I begged. My mouth was burning. And I took a good drink out of the bottle the men offered. How sweet and refreshing! I'm living again! Had I wings I would be flying with joy and happiness!

But dear Yoon Hi, why are you not here? Where are you Li Yoon Hi? Spread out your wings of youth!

Over the eastern mountains the morning sun was rising brightly through the dark clouds. What a beautiful land this is, my dear fatherland! The people's land! The land of happiness! For you I will give my youth and my very life!

Why I Fled from South Korea

KIM UP
Former Major, Commander of First Battalion, Third Regiment, Seventh Division, ROK Army

To Recollect

AT NO time did I know, as I have learned in the past five years out of my short life of thirty odd years, that life could have so much meaning. I have learned the true meaning of life and the value of human being. Above all, I came to experience the joy of being a proud part of an independent and free nation.

Snow is still to be seen on the north side of the hills. But the feel of spring is in the air.

Before long azaleas will be blooming.

The spring must be in full bloom in my dear home town! Woolsan, South Kyungsang Province, is far south from where I am now, and spring is much earlier than here. There is hardly a day when I do not think of my home town. But, particularly around this time of year the feeling of nostalgia overtakes me. I wonder if it is because it was in May that I came over to the North.

What kind of spring is my home town having this year, I wonder. The beautiful wild berries and peach blossoms must be gone by now. But I "sense" the camellia perfumed air. How fragrant!

For a long time I have not heard from my mother who passed sixty a few years back. After my father's death she had been struggling against poverty and sickness. I was the eldest son, her only comfort in her misery and old age. I wonder how my sisters and brothers are—Ok Soon, who became almost blind after the death of her

husband who was killed by the Syngman Rhee clique, and Boon I, my younger sister and two brothers Joon Tai and In Tai. They should be in primary school now.

I long for my home town when I think of my folks and my good neighbours. And beautiful nature! But alas, the place reminds me of the bitter, miserable life I went through in fear and contempt.

I had to leave the place.

Endless Misery

The family I was born in was a poor charcoal maker. Many poor people under colonialism were forced to leave their native villages to seek a "better" life in Japan. My father spent more than 30 years in Yamaguchi Prefecture making charcoal.

Liberation of Korea came when I was 17 years old. Ever since I was a child, with the exception of a few occasions, my father and all his friends were covered with charcoal powder.

With the country's liberation and believing such horrible life would not be our fate any more, we returned to our native land which my father had left some 30 years before.

But it did not take us long to realize that our cherished dreams were nothing but illusions.

Our beloved land which we returned to was not a land of freedom. But the same land of slavery, only under a new master. Life was harder than before.

In the so-called liberated South Korea my parents could hardly make both ends meet. We lived on a hand-to-mouth basis. Father and mother did all sorts of menial work to stand off hunger. The national disgrace was also difficult to bear. I tried to be a sort of long-shoreman in Pusan. We all worked but could hardly scrape together two meals a day.

The work on the water front was very heavy for an eighteen year old like me. But even that work was not to be had regularly. Sometimes I stood all day on my empty stomach. When I did find something to carry on my back I felt dizzy. Lest I fell, I had to exert all my strength to secure my footing. Then the vulgar, beast-like

Americans would swear at me at the top of their lungs. "Too slow!" They yelled and sometimes added a kick with their heavy boots.

Soon I felt I could bear no more of this. I could have stood the shame, because no place in South Korea was without that, but my body could not stand such work.

I decided to find new work. I searched high and low and asked many people to help me. At last I was able to scrape some money together and bought a fire-man's position with the Pusan Fire Department.

Almost twenty-four hours a day I had to stay as fire alarms were constantly ringing. While I was at the Fire Department I decided to snatch a leisure hour to study by myself. To study had been my great ambition. When in Japan I barely managed to finish primary school. How I did wish to go to middle school! But I had to work to help the family.

If I worked hard, I thought, I could make myself a middle school graduate. As I began to dislike the job and the going grew tougher, my mind became firmly fixed to give myself a self-taught middle school education. Many nights I didn't get a wink, trying to catch up on my studies.

My self-study bore some fruit. In the summer of 1947 I passed the examination for teacher's qualification and became a teacher at Samkwang Primary School, Kimhai County, South Kyungsang Province. It was my first non-manual job and naturally my expectations were high.

Since I could not continue my education, I decided to put my heart and soul into teaching children. I was well liked by the pupils and put all my energy into teaching. It was my first meaningful work. But I suffered as usual from poverty and mental suppression. Had it not been for the children, perhaps I could not have stayed on as long as I did. Because it was not very long before unbearable obstacles arose in my path.

It happened in the latter part of autumn of the year. One day the school custodian came to tell me that the

principal wanted to see me. When I went in his office he said:

"Mr. Kim, I need your pupils tomorrow. But please don't forget to tell them to bring along lunch and sickles and..." I was taken aback as I knew of no particular plans for the following day.

"Is there something special planned for tomorrow?" I asked.

"Oh, I guess you don't know what I mean, since you are new here. It has been customary with the school children to work in the rice fields of the principal and superintendent. Tomorrow my fields have to be harvested. And if the children work two or three days more in the field, then the whole thing will be finished."

I learnt later that these brazen characters make the fifth and sixth grade pupils cultivate their fields of some 8,000 pyung. Besides, much of their land had been parceled out to tenants. The superintendent and sixth grade teacher were of this brand. Many of the teachers were of landlord families, so-called village leaders and district head and police chief. So they were not in the school to teach but they were there because they didn't know what to do their time. Therefore, such practice was tolerated and encouraged.

The autumn slipped by and the winter came around. The cold blast presented always a yet harder life to the poverty-stricken people.

The famers, out of their meager yield, had to pay many kinds of taxes, contributions and what not. Besides, the debts had to be paid up. At the end hardly anything was left for the poor farmers. Such miserable picture could be seen even in the school. Even before the first snowfall, some 20 children out of fifth grade stayed away from the school. At the beginning they missed one day, then two days, three days.... Then they did not show up at all. And this was not limited just to my class. It was impossible for the farmers, who could not eat three square meals a day, to meet so many obligations such as tuitions and various fees for entertaining teachers.

The principal, superintendent and a few teachers were having the best time. They could collect plenty

from their fields which the school children worked and the "contributions" they squeezed out of the poor families provided enough money for them to live lavishly.

Then, another incident occurred.

The winter morning was very gloomy and it looked as if it would begin snowing any moment. We were having a teachers' meeting in the morning. The principal said that the sixth grade pupils should go to near-by mountains to collect firewood. Firewood not for the class-rooms but for the principal, superintendent and leading teachers' houses.

This order, however, the sixth grade teacher Choi Bong Do refused to follow. He said:

"I'm sorry but cannot allow myself to carry out your order. How could I send little children to collect firewood while they are shivering in the class-room. As you know, there is no fire in the stove."

As the teacher Choi spoke, his face became white and his voice rose. And with piercing eyes he kept looking at the principal with burning hatred. The principal evidently did not expect anything like that. The colour drained from his face and the muscles of his face contracted.

"What? Do you mean you can't carry out my order? Who do you think you are? Why is it wrong for the pupils to help their teachers out of respect?"

For some time I had been admiring Mr. Choi for his uprightness. On many occasions he and I expressed our disgust with the negative aspects of society. When he spoke out his mind about the principal's order, a sense of agitation swept over me. I was almost ready to speak up in support of him, when the principal's angry voice interrupted.

"All right, if you don't want to. But I'm warning you, you'll be sorry for this. This damn green horn has no respect for his superiors..." Then turning to me he continued:

"Then, Mr. Kim, you will take your class to do the job. I think it's better for the children to bring along lunch and I'm sure you will find some ropes in the warehouse to tie up firewood."

As he finished speaking, he raised his heavy body from the chair and started to walk out towards his room. I could not keep silence any more.

"I'm sorry but I can't do that either. First place, what makes you think that you have right to make the children work in your field and collect firewood in this cold on their empty stomach?" I thought I had overstepped a little too far, but I could not retreat. I added, under no circumstances, would I make my pupils go out to collect firewood for him.

The principal, I presumed, did not expect to have another one like Choi in one morning. Glaring with his bloodshot eyes at Choi and me and breathing hard, he yelled "My god! Where do these Reds come from? Pretending they protect somebody, they work against the principal and wreck the smooth operation of our school. I'll show you..."

At this point, a teacher named Pak who was a son of the District Head, started to strike my friend Choi as an expression of his loyalty to the principal. In the nick of time I caught his hand and knocked him down. That started something. The teachers separated into two groups and fists flew thick and fast.

Three days after this incident a school inspector came down to look over the school, as they put it. After his "investigation" he recommended to the principal that Choi and I should be dropped from the school. The pupils went on a strike against the school authorities, in support of us.

Thus a new phase of my life, in which I had placed great hope, came to an end even before a year was out. I was put out on the street again.

I never met my friend Choi again. I wonder if he is still alive...

In Search of Life

As days went by, things became very tough for me as I was branded a "subversive element." My world kept being narrowed and I had no place to turn. Nevertheless, within myself some new faith was growing. I knew things

would not stay as they were, and sooner or later they were bound to change. No hardships could send me to desperation.

The first three months after my discharge from the school I spent with my sister and her husband in Pusan. During that time I tried to find a job but in vain. But I learned many things from my brother-in-law that I had not known before. Among other things he taught me why we had to suffer under the exploitation of landlords and capitalists. He criticized them sharply. To my questions he replied with simple words which made me find my own answers. He said:

"Under no circumstances, if the present conditions prevail, can we enjoy human dignity. It is impossible. We have to rid ourselves of the Americans and their hirelings."

One day after our usual discussion he suggested I should try the Syngman Rhee's Army since I could find no job.

That time Syngman Rhee's Army was called Korean Security Force. I was then only twenty years old. I may have lacked judgement but the pressing question of unemployment made me to decide to join the outfit as my brother-in-law had suggested. However, I must add, I was not entirely without curiosity, as a young man, about army life.

This I learned much later, but, when my brother-in-law suggested my joining the army he had some big plan. Perhaps he thought a big change would take in the army after the withdrawal of the American occupation forces.

On June 1, 1949, I joined the 15th Battalion, 3rd Division of Syngman Rhee's Security Forces in Masan as a second class private.

After two months I was sent to Seoul to enter the officers' training school. Inasmuch as the training school was for turning out fascist army officers, it adopted both Japanese and American military training systems.

While I was at the school, the Yusoo revolt of the 14th Regiment occured. It was a revolt by the men and officers

of the 14th Regiment against the American imperialists and the Syngman Rhee clique. They successfully terminated arch-reactionaries and liberated large areas around Soonchun and Yusoo to free a large number of people from their bondage.

But the desired results were not achieved due to their numerical weakness and the bloody suppression.

When the incident was over, the American and Syngman Rhee troops subjected the inhabitants of those areas to severe torture and mass slaughter. People were wantonly killed regardless of whether or not they actually participated in the revolt.

The officers' training was a most trusted institution of Syngman Rhee. Fearing that the revolt may reach Seoul, the school was put on alert. Very often in the dark streets around the Jangchoondan Park, while I was on patrol duty, many thoughts came to my mind. Considering the situation the people and army had to face in South Korea, I thought, such revolt was only natural and many more would follow.

In November, 1949, I finished the courses at the school and was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 15th Regiment, 5th Division. I was a company leader, and my regiment was sent to Yusoo to replace the 14th Regiment which was the main force in the revolt.

When we reached Yusoo, it was still under martial law. After dusk curfew was in effect. Every night shots were heard from all directions. People's anger at the puppet regime was still very much alive.

The Division Headquarters in Kwangju arranged an inspection tour of the revolt areas for the new officers, its purpose being that this tour would give newly assigned officers practical knowledge and more boldness. Moreover, they wanted to show us that no method was too cruel so long as it could suppress the people. In three trucks we started out for the areas where the fighting was severe. For this trip we were told to wear civilian clothes.

As we drove, we could see no village was intact and corpses were lying here and there. Very rarely we met local inhabitants, who were full of hatred and revenge against the blood-thirsty murderers who took away their beloved

ones. When we had covered some 30 miles from Hwasoon, we stopped for lunch.

At this time the Chief of Staff who was leading us received two prisoners from the police. Those two prisoners were bound. After lunch, taking the prisoners with us, we drove out some miles to a valley.

Judging from the freshness of dirt on their torn clothes, I thought, they were put under custody a short time before. There were even some blood-stains on their pale faces. As if they were expressing their anger, they took lively steps as the Chief of Staff pulled them along. Their eyes were cold but shone with hate and revenge. The prisoners were lined up under a huge maple tree. We were told that these men were miners of Hwasoon coal mine who participated in the revolt. The Chief said:

"Gentlemen, to carry out our duty effectively we have to cultivate bravery. Only in that way can the officers of National Security Forces lead soldiers well in actual combat . . . I want to see some brave men out of your group come forward and take a shot at these people."

His words sent a shiver through me. I realized once more these were beasts in human skin. More surprising was, as he finished talking, some 15 men jumped off the truck with their guns. From the officers' training school days these men had been notorious. They must have been learning very fast from the Americans, for every one of them was chewinggum. They acted as if they were doing something pleasant. With broad grins on their faces they took aim at the prisoners.

I could not bear looking at the scene. Hiding my face behind the men, I waited for the outcome. Soon shots rang out. Here, for the first time in my life, I saw people taking death standing up even without a wink. Unspeakable agony and anxiety overtook me. I have no words to describe my feeling. My thought went to the families of these two good people whom they had just shot. Knowing not they would never return, the families must be waiting for them. The night must be very dark and long, and tears may be raining down their cheeks.

This horrible scene shook me to the core. I didn't know what to do with myself. But our trucks kept rolling through

the gloomy waste land. There were some rice fields waiting to be harvested. In ordinary times, I'm sure, these would have been harvested long time ago. But the whole region was deserted, only corpses — some in army uniform — strewn here and there.

However, such unhappiness and misery bound the people together more firmly and they marched forward unflinchingly to resist. I do not know whether some of the officers cultivated "bravery" from this inspection tour or not, but as for me, it was more than clear who the suppressors were and whom we should fight against.

After the inspection trip, in March, 1949, we were dispatched to Kwangyang for the mop-up operation. It was the night before the day we were supposed to go into action. I was tormented all night over the thought that I would be killing innocent people. How could I join the mop-up operation? With these thoughts I sat cleaning my gun. In front of my eyes appeared the faces of the miners whom they shot to show their bravery. Those shots seemed to still be ringing in my ears. I did not know how it happened but my gun was discharged and a bullet went through my thigh. Because of the wound I did not have to join the operation. To recall now, it was a very fortunate accident.

I was admitted to Army Hospital No. 3 in Kwangjoo and eventually the 5th Hospital in Pusan where I spent four months.

During my stay in the hospital, in conformity with the rules and regulations of the National Security Force, I was promoted to First Lieutenant of the puppet army.

On the strength of my wound I succeeded in securing an assignment to train new recruits. In order to do that, I studied two more months at the Infantry School and returned to the 3rd Battalion of the 15th Regiment stationed in Junjoo.

It was February, 1950. Originally this regiment was in Yusoo but to prepare for the invasion against the North it was transferred to Junjoo. Junjoo was the 3rd line of ROK army. Beyond Junjoo there were no more armed forces stationed in the South. For some time they had been preparing for their march to the North and all their military forces were brought nearer to the 38th parallel.

In Junjoo I was assigned to draw up military operation plans and conduct military education. I was an inspector in military operations.

For the first time I started to work with an American Captain named Lucky, an American military advisor. He was one of those Americans one would meet every day on the street. When he laughed his eyes were half shut and his twisted mouth showed his unscrupulousness. He would wipe off his hairy hand on his handkerchief after shaking hands with us. But he had a full control of the regiment and we were truly and completely his puppets.

Then the bloody, cursed June came around. Anticipating a military invasion against the North, the whole regiment was being put on active duty. War was in the air. But many were frightened and the number of desertions increased while many more were forced into the army.

I thought of running away but I could not think of a place to hide myself. The only place left for me was the hospital, so I complained of my left thigh. Eventually I was admitted to the 5th Army Hospital.

Shortly after I entered the hospital, sure enough the puppet army started its adventure. Even though I was lying on a hospital bed, I could judge how things were moving. Repeated defeats brought about great confusion among the ranks of Syngman Rhee's army and their morale fell to the ground.

One day suddenly my brother-in-law came to the hospital to see me. He told me that before long the People's Army would liberate this part of the country, and he himself was organizing an underground movement in the Pusan Textile Mill to prepare for the day.

"Tell me what I should do! How could I face the Liberation Army from an army hospital bed?" I asked my brother-in-law, and these were his words:

"I think you should run away from this hospital but you had better keep that uniform on, because it will come in very handy . . ."

Next morning I asked my doctor to release me from the hospital because I was feeling better and the war situation was very urgent, showing my "loyalty" to ROK army.

I was discharged from the hospital and hid myself at my brother-in-law's place. Their house had a wooden floor which provided me with a nice shelter. A little sunlight came through the holes of the boards and I was all ears to catch what was going on outside.

The approach of the People's Army to Pusan was reported. And people in Pusan were all excited with hope. The People's Army were expected momentarily.

Something happened. My brother-in-law did not come home one evening. We waited all day for him next day, but no word from him. My sister found out on the fourth day that many workers of the Textile Mill had been arrested by the police.

Soon the C.I.C. man came to the house to search. Underneath the wooden floor I took out the gun I had taken from the hospital and followed the foot steps above the floor. They threatened my sister with death if she would not tell them the whereabouts of Kim Kap Soo, my brother-in-law's friend. Apparently they didn't think they could get much out of her, and they left.

Three days later we heard that my brother-in-law had been shot. We learned later there seemed to be a turncoat among the workers. Many were arrested and taken out to the open sea. They were lined up on a narrow plank board stretching out from the deck and machinegunned one by one, their bodies dropping into the sea.

Some time later the American imperialists, mobilizing all their forces in the Pacific area, made a landing operation at Inchon, which brought about a change in the war. Under arduous conditions the People's Army undertook a temporary retreat. This was a great blow to me sending me down into the limitless misfortune.

The hand of the enemy was closing on me. But, since my brother-in-law who led me was gone, I didn't know where to turn. My sister's house was constantly watched and I could not figure out how I would be able to eat. Suddenly the name Kim Kap Soo that I heard the C.I.C. man mentioned came to me. I asked my sister if she knew where this man lived, but she did not know. I was facing a blind alley. Next thing I thought of was an escape — going to

the North. But how? Pusan is at the southern tip of Korea and it is a long way — a difficult way — to the North. But I did not give up. I knew something would happen.

For a better life, to find a better life, I have to be strong. And I knew I had to get away from the place and work to drive out all the sorrows and misery from this land of ours.

For a New Life

The year 1950 was drawing to a close. The liberation I anticipated did not materialize. The cheerless year was disappearing.

The streets of Pusan were filled with drunkards and were rife with war scare. From the numerous bars such cheap tunes as "Blue Waltz" and "San Francisco Chinatown" were blaring. The city was overflowing with refugees from Seoul, and jumbled with tents, box houses and what not. With the coming cold weather the outlook of the people in that crowded, gloomy, desperate city was indeed miserable. People were without hope and fears gripped them.

For several days I roamed around the streets of Pusan. One night I decided to have visit with my sister. When I knocked at my sister's house there was no response. I gave another knock, this time a loud one. Presently my sister's landlady peeped out saying "Who is it?" She recognized me, and opened the door for me.

My sister, according to the old lady, left the place about three days before. Because of the constant police annoyance she could not live there. And she did not know where my sister went to. The landlady sold a few pieces of clothing which my sister left behind to make up the unpaid rent. And she was not displeased with a few pieces of house utensils that were left in the house.

I was very disappointed. I bade goodbye to the old lady and started aimlessly back. As I was turning a corner, suddenly a black figure appeared and pulled me in. It was so sudden I even took out the pistol from my pocket. The stranger asked:

"You are Hak Chun's brother-in-law, aren't you? I heard you and the old lady talking a minute ago . . ." Hak

Chun was my brother-in-law's name. But I was not too sure of this stranger. Evidently he knew this as he offered to identify himself by saying:

"I don't know whether your brother-in-law has ever told you about me or not. My name is Kim Kap Soo."

"Then you are the one . . ." I was surprised but very glad to meet him. He said that he too had come to see my sister only to find that she had gone.

From then on we became good friends and I drank in whatever he told me as a thirsty man drinks in cool water. He explained to me about the new situation and many new developments.

One day I asked him what would be the best thing for me to do under the circumstances, to which he answered:

"Well, it is not so easy to say one way or the other. Perhaps something might turn out. But in the meantime, did you ever think of going back to the army?" I was a little puzzled at his unexpected answer. Soon he continued:

"But I'm sure the easiest way to go over to the North is from the front line."

I could not help wondering why I did not think of this before. When I was discharged from the hospital the necessary identification papers were made out for me which were still in my possession. And besides, I knew many classmates of the officers' training school in Tongrai Hospital.

That time the Syngman Rhee's army was in the process of reorganizing from the rout they suffered by the People's Army. There was great confusion among them and hardly any morale to speak of. Taking advantage of the situation I went to Tongrai Hospital which was a convalescent hospital.

No one even thought of suspecting me, wearing the First Lieutenant's insignia and carrying a gun. I looked up at a former class mate who was the administrative officer. First of all, I bought him a few drinks, then I asked him if I could spend a few days at the hospital. I told him that I had been treated at the Pusan Hospital, which was followed by a short rest at my house. And I added I was in need of quiet rest. He admitted me to the hospital with little discussion. I looked like a patient due to hunger and suffering. My

hospital life was not uncomfortable. Because I was a First Lieutenant the treatment was fair, and before long I regained color and I felt much better.

I did not know how they figured, but while I was lying in the hospital bed I was promoted to captain.

The convalescent hospital was a made-to-order place for those who wanted to evade the front line duties. It is true nearly every officer and man of the puppet army wanted to run away from the front line to a place like this. But to do that one needed money and power. So, every "patient" of this hospital was a son of a rich family. In expensive pajamas they sat around playing cards all day long, flirting with pretty nurses and nibbling the best candies. The guy next to my bed, Kim Sung Nam came from one of the wealthiest families in Chulla Province. And he had been here nearly a year.

In June, 1951, I was discharged from the hospital, upon which I was assigned to the 3rd Battalion of the 28th Regiment, 9th Division. I was the Battalion Commander and as I had hoped I was stationed at Keumhwa. It was the first front line duty given to me, and I witnessed with my own eyes the tragedy of Koreans killing Koreans. No one, unless he experienced, would comprehend the horror of a Korean with American arms, under the direction of Americans, aiming at another Korean. No wonder then many turn to alcohol to cloud their minds while many wise ones cross over to join the ranks of the People's Army.

Then there were the dregs of human being who have lost all human conscience and behave like wild beasts.

Surrounded by such people, I became more determined. After two months' service at the front, I was made an assistant to the Divisional Chief of Operations. And I was at the same time the commanding officer of the Junior Officers Training School.

My position became more secure and all important information was available for me. And on my part I collected as much information as possible for my own purposes. All I needed was to get in touch with Kim Kap Soo and receive instructions from him.

In order to do this, I decided to ask for a furlough. It was customary for the senior officers of the puppet army

to ask for a furlough whenever they wished to have a good time. So when I asked for furlough it was given without any trouble. In October that year, I proceeded to Army Hospital No. 23 in Woolsan for a rest. Things were moving as I planned.

Escape

As the days of 1951 waned, the torch of my hope kept burning brighter than ever in my heart. Shortly I would be crossing the line of death to the land of freedom, to the bosom of my fatherland, leaving behind all the miseries and shames that I had suffered. The time for decision was at hand. It was time for me to show the enemy bravery that they themselves wanted me to cultivate so much.

In Woolsan I had talks with Kim Kap Soo and a plan was worked out. If things moved as planned, I would be celebrating the New Year in the North.

When I left the hospital at the beginning of December, I was promoted to a Major now. I was a senior officer. A jeep was provided for my use and I was a "big wheel."

I was to return to the Division Headquarters, but working at the Headquarters would not serve my purpose as well as the front line. I went directly to the Personnel Department of the Army in Taegu instead of reporting to the Division Headquarters. I told the personnel officer that I wanted to serve at the front. He went through my papers and looked at me with dubious eyes, which gave me a setback. Fear came over me wondering if that guy knew all about me. A bit strange, of course, for it was almost a rule for officers and men to try to evade front line duties. So, I was relieved when he said:

"Oh, Major! You must be in an awful hurry to get another medal. But I'm afraid, at this moment, there is no suitable place for you. What do you think of going down to the 7th Division for the time being?"

Within a week after I came down to the 7th Division Headquarters, the People's Army which was facing the 7th Division of the puppet army launched an attack taking advantage of the Christmas Holiday.

At the 7th Division Headquarters the officers were

celebrating Christmas Eve. Many drinks were passed around. Then, suddenly the attack came.

The First Battalion of the 3rd Regiment suffered a complete annihilation. Two companies were totally wiped out and casualties were very high. Because of this rout the commanding officer Koh Hak Yong of the First Battalion was dismissed. There was much discussion as to who should replace the position as it was a very important one.

On the 28th of December I received an assignment to fill the position. Now, I was a battalion commander at the front facing directly the North across the no man's land. Being a battalion commander, I could "lord" at the front, and I had access to all secret information.

To prepare the execution of my plan, one by one I helped the people, whom I planned to cross over to the North with, get located near the front lines. They were Pak Ok Kyung, a former senior nurse of the Syngman Rhee's army who later became my wife, Kim Jong Woon and Ha Chung Nak, both my former co-workers. I made acquaintance with Pak Ok Kyung when I was at the Pusan and Tongrai Hospital.

I drilled my companions for every kind of eventualities and difficulty we might face, and particularly I tried to give them a clear picture of the geographical features of the region.

The time for action was approaching!

With the coming of May Day, a tenseness swept my battalion. The Christmas attack was still fresh in their memory, and it was just a few days before May 1st. And they "knew" another attack of the People's Army was forthcoming. It was my plan to carry out my escape after May Day.

At this time we had a new regiment commander, Colonel Yoo I Joon. He was a very ambitious man. In his first formal statement he said: "We lack knowledge of the enemy situation. We have to capture some prisoners. This is my first order."

I thought this was my chance. I asked the new commander if he would give me permission to capture some prisoners. He was very pleased remarking that I, as battalion commanding officer, did not have to go but I could send out some of my men. But I insisted saying:

"Please permit me to go. Because I sent out my men on so many missions, but all ended in failure. And it is my wish to do everything to carry out your orders this time."

The whole battalion was excited over the news that a battalion commander would lead a patrol to bring back some enemy captives. And some even "admired" my undertaking.

The time was drawing near. April 28, 29, and then 30! By this time I asked Lieutenant Koo Yung Hoi to organize a patrol. But I personally replaced all the vicious characters from the patrol when I made my inspection.

May Day came around. Under close surveillance I made the patrol members take a rest, while I was busy in making the final arrangements.

I ordered my companions to disguise as junior officers or liaison men.

May 2nd! That was the day!

I told the patrol men they should take an early supper. At four o'clock in the afternoon we started out. While we were waiting for nightfall at a forward position I gave an instruction to my men:

"We are to capture enemy soldiers as ordered by the regiment commander. You have to follow my instructions strictly. Even when we face the enemy, without my orders, no shots are to be fired. On every occasion you should wait for my orders and no one is to retreat. And any one who violates my orders will be subject to an immediate court-martial."

I could see everyone was nervous and tense. After giving instructions I inspected their guns. Every one of them had ample ammunition. I removed most of them leaving a few bullets. And I told them that we were not going to shoot but capture the enemy. Therefore we would not need so much ammunition.

Now it was completely dark and a new moon was up casting a thin light. I was about to order men to start out when a man came up to tell me that he was sent by the company commander to protect me. He was a medic,

I was sure that he asked for this job to butter the battalion commander. I thought he would be a nuisance but I kept him when he answered me that he had no gun on him. He said he was carrying only a first-aid-kid.

I gave him my knapsack telling him that ammunition for emergency use was in it. But actually it contained secret papers and a short-wave set.

The patrol started out. No matter how careful we were, every step shook the night air. The whole region was covered with dry leaves. Behind the forty men who were almost crawling down the hill I slowly followed.

In front of us opened a silky stream! Beyond this the People's Army was stationed. By the stream I gave them final instructions and took out five men including the medic to come along with me besides my companions who wanted to cross to the North.

Then I asked Lieutenant Koo to take the rest of the men and wait in the valley.

Nine people crossed the stream and climbed up a little mound. After a short rest we started out again. We had gone some hundred metres. Suddenly a sharp voice "Who goes there?" penetrated the darkness.

I raised my hand. One tall soldier of the People's Army approached. I told him that we were the Syngman Rhee's Army men who wanted to come over to the North. Then I and my companions with our guns disarmed the five men who had come along with us.

Now, at long last we were in the bosom of the land which we had longed for so long. Even the moon peeped through the dark clouds, and cast a bright light on us who were standing breathing the free air of the fatherland.

Again into the Embrace of the Republic

LI YUNG JO
Former Sergeant, 35th Regiment, 5th Division, 3rd Corps of ROK Army

Before Joining the ROK Army

I WAS in Pusan when the August 15 Liberation came. I was then 15 years old.

With the liberation we expected a big change. The Japanese rulers retreated and the U.S. army came in. But we were poor as ever. My father continued to work in a rice mill, and I barely managed to complete the primary school.

But before long the rice mill was closed down, and my father was thrown out on the street. Now the going was really tough.

"What is liberation?" sighed my father. "It is just as bad as before, if not worse."

I could not fully understand what these words meant, but I was sure of one thing — our hard life.

Fortunately, father found work at a tile-yard, near the Tongrai hot springs, not far from Pusan. The workers were forced to live in the wrecked cottages on the premises of the tile-yard. This was a design of the owner to get more out of the workers. Three of us, father, my elder brother and I, started to work there.

There were no fixed working hours, and very often we were forced to work 14-15 hours a day for very little pay. The "wages" we were paid could not buy us even one meal a day.

In the summer of 1946, cholera was rampant in the village taking a terrific toll of lives. The U.S. Military

Police took away every patient to an isolation hospital but took no preventive measures. Our village alone lost more than 150 people. Among them were my father and two of my younger brothers. My elder brother lived but suffered paralysis. Out of the seven family members, four—mother, my elder brother and younger one and I — survived. We lost the family's mainstay, and another bread winner was disabled.

Yang Jai Hoon, our boss, seeing that I was the only working hand left in the family, which was not much, demanded us to vacate his premises. Of course, it was out of question ever to think of helping us. I kept on with that job, but could earn but little. I was barely 16.

These were difficult times for mother.

Shortly afterwards my younger brother became ill suddenly and there was nothing to give him to eat. My grieving mother coaxed me to go my aunt's. She thought her sister might be able to let us have some rice.

My aunt was farming in the nearby Kimhai County. "But I don't know how she can help us," I said. However, mother insisted I should try. In the end, I started, though reluctantly. When I arrived at the foot of the Mandeuk Hill, the sun was already setting.

I decided to take a short-cut by going over the top of the hill. When I reached the top, I was almost out of breath, so I sat down on a rock to rest. Just then, I heard hushed voices and several men appeared from below carrying jiges (a kind of rack used to carry loads on the back).

I was glad to find companions to travel with and was eagerly waiting for them to come up.

Just at this moment, a sharp voice shouted from behind: "Hands Up!" Frightened, I raised my hands without even looking back. Then the men below hurried up to me.

At first I took them for partisans. But judging from their behaviours, I soon realized they were policemen.

"Where are you going?" they shouted at me.

"To my aunt's in Kimhai," I mumbled in a shaky voice.

"To Kimhai by this way? Don't you know the broad highway to Kimhai over there?"

"I know it, but this is a short-cut..."

"Shut up! You god damn liar! And what are you going to your aunt's for? Tell the truth!"

"I hope to get some rice."

"Rice? You bastard! What do you take us for? Then we will tell the truth for you; you are waiting for partisans here, aren't you?"

"No, sir! Oh, no! Nothing like that..."

It was useless to try to explain. They took me to the police station and I was put through all kinds of torture there for a week. They forced me to drink "pepper-water", hung me by my hands tied behind me (they call this "an aeroplane") and subjected me to "the electric shock".

But I was, so to speak, a blank sheet of paper and they could get nothing out of me.

"Son of a bitch! Do this again in the future and that will be your last." With this they kicked me out.

Thus I was released and returned home. At home, my mother and brothers were all upset. What was worse, the tile-yard owner suspected me as "red" and pressed us ever more to get out of his factory. The villagers, too, looked at me in a strange way. And all this was not without reason. Policemen came in every other day to question and threaten me.

"We know you have been to the partisans' haunts in the mountain... Give out what you have plotted with them!... We know everything about you. Tell the truth." But, I had nothing to tell them. Then they beat me black and blue. This regular visits were simply unbearable for me. Particularly mother was dying from worry. "Son! You can't go on being beaten like this every day. Some way must be found for you to get out of here."

I knew her heart was breaking. But, where could I go?

"Go far away some place where they can't get you, or you will be killed. Never mind us a bit."

But could mother get on without me? She seemed determined that I should go some place. To tell the truth, I,

on my part, was not confident that I could stand the torture any longer.

"Well, I will try..." At last I made up my mind to go away. But where to? Suddenly an idea struck me to call on Son Yung Taik, an acquaintance of mine. He was a company commander in the ROK Army. Perhaps he could help me to join the army. I will join the army and may be able to feed myself there. I hurried to Mungyung where the 7th Regiment to which Son Yung Taik belonged was stationed.

By then I was already 19 years old, but I was shabbily dressed. This poor appearance, together with my short stature and the rags I was in, by no means would make a favourable impression on others, I feared. I expected the regiment commander would make a wry look at me when I appeared before him. However, in their haste to gather cannon fodder, they did not bar me.

Thus I joined the army in May 1949.

"Now I am free from the threats of both the police and hunger!" I thought to myself. The first night in the army, I threw myself down on the bed in complete relaxation, brushing aside all cares, even my home.

The War

The military life was far from what I had imagined. It was so horrible that I began to regret having joined the army. And things got steadily worse.

First of all, we were given quite unedible meals. They supplied us with rotten American wheat, boiled even without washing. To make matters worse, the quantity was so small that eating it was no better than an elephant taking a piece of biscuit.

"God damn it! Are you supposed to eat this?"

"You block head! Privates must be satisfied with what they get. Don't you know that above you there are the division commander, regiment commander, company commander and then our section commander. And they all dip their fingers in the things coming to us. So figure it out for yourself. Now you know why you smoke five or even

less cigarettes out of the ten we are supposed to get everyday?"

This is what the privates exchanged in whispers when two or three of them got together. But I remained in the army, persuading myself that nevertheless it's still better than death.

From the beginning of 1950, the atmosphere became heavy in the army with the war threat of "march north". The number of recruits grew rapidly, and early in May a large scale movement of the army units began. Our unit, too, minus the newly enlisted removed to a place near the 38th parallel line.

However, I was shifted to the 35th Regiment of the 5th Division which was newly formed in Masan and appointed as an assistant instructor in the ranks of non-commissioned officers.

"Lucky! The flames of the war will never reach here..." If plunged into the war, there would be no surviving, I thought.

On the 25th of June, 1950, the war broke out. Notwithstanding the loud congratulations for the victories of "our side", the government and streams of people rushed down to the southern tip. I wondered how the "Communist army", which, according to what they had said, was no army, could defeat so easily the ROK army armed with up-to-date weapons by the U.S. army. And I was horror stricken to reflect that despite of the participation in the war of the U.S. army itself, they gave up Taijun, Kwangju and Mokpo in succession, not to speak of Seoul, and were crowded into a narrow strip around Taigu and Pusan.

As matters stood then, the whole territory of South Korea was sure to be given up. If caught we should be "killed" by the Communist army. The officers said that the Communists do not kill men outright, but in a savagely cruel way, first by cutting off the nose, then taking eyes out, etc. So the very idea of Communists coming there made me tremble and shiver.

Masan, too, was in imminent danger. We got out and moved to the Rakdong River line. But even there I did not engage in any big battle.

In the meantime the ROK Army began to march north beyond the 38th line late September.

With the turn of New Year we engaged in the battle of Height 1211, which was horror itself. All our forces thrown into the fight were annihilated by the People's Army. American G I units were in the rear to watch the ROK Army men who stood at the front. We were the bullet shields for the American G I s. If anyone tried to turn back, he was shot down by Americans. I witnessed numerous men of the "ROK" Army mowed down this way. We used to call the place the Pit Valley. I don't know how, but I got out of the valley alive. Our regiment was reinforced in 1952 and transferred to defend the Height.

The longer the war was prolonged, the sicker I got of it. I couldn't understand at all for whom I was fighting and why we Koreans of the same blood had to fire at each other.

P.O.W. Life

When my regiment was stationed at Height 351 I was assigned to a reconnaisance company. In view of the fixed state of the front line, reconnoitering operations now assumed special importance. But the scouting companies never returned without loss. Despite heavy losses, we were forced to continue the work. On May 15, I left the trench as leader of a search-party consisting of five men.

It was a dark night, and stillness seemed to envelop us. Even one twisting of a branch could wake up the whole mountain side. But the night was shining with a multitude of stars. We made our way ahead quietly. Loneliness and fear were overwhelming. Suddenly the face of my mother appeared in front of me, just as if she were really there, I said: "Mother! Is that really you? How are you? Certainly it has been a long time!" A sudden sharp voice brought me to life:

"Halt! Hands up!" A dark figure emerged from a bush pointing his gun at us. When we stopped, fire broke out from all directions. I fell flat on the spot. Both sides continued to fire for a while. A hot pain ripped my leg. Bullets

were pelting my legs and arms. "This is the end" was all I could think of.

Presently, the firing stopped, and stillness reigned again.

But it was only for a moment. Soon I heard steps approaching. When they found me, I was taken prisoner. I learned later that it was a patrol of the 9th Division of the People's Army that took me. They had to carry me on stretcher. Their wounded colleague — there was one — was also carried alongside me.

However, I never dreamed that they were carrying me to a hospital. It was inconceivable to me they should take so much trouble to carry a wounded enemy soldier to the hospital. Then, I said to myself they would kill me by cutting off the nose and taking out the eyes, but only after they pumped me for all military information.

But after some brief questioning on the deployment of "ROK Army", they said that I should be sent to a hospital far in the rear. I was much worried. Why this tedious prolongation and not getting it over with right away?

The wounded man of the People's Army, who was to be sent to the rear together with me, smiled at me, and even tried to comfort me. But I took all this for a design to disguise their real intentions.

Anyway in a few days we arrived at a hospital, where a surgical operation was made on me.

I could not make it all out. Everyone in the room where I was lying was kind and friendly. And a beautiful nurse, always smiling brightly, took care of me. Yet I was not entirely free of my "fears". Everything was quite beyond me.

I was accorded just the same treatment as the men of the People's Army who were with me in the room. And I don't think those men really knew I was a P.O.W.

Meanwhile, I improved, so I could walk around freely. Then I was permitted even to hunt.

At first, I couldn't believe it, but I was given a rifle and bullets. Their trust in me was beyond my comprehension and sometimes I still wondered if it was all on the level!

When I was discharged from the hospital upon my

complete recovery, I was sent to P.O.W. Camp No. 8. There I belonged to the 11th group. My colleagues in the camp were all healthy and cheerful. We were accorded there the same treatment as that given to the soldiers of the People's Army and the camp officers spoke to us always in terms of respect as to their own men.

The camp had a well-equipped hospital, a club house for various kinds of recreation. Athletic meetings were held once a week and there were regular weekly movies.

Life in the camp was very pleasant.

In the morning we had newspaper reading followed by classes on social history and current international developments. And the whole afternoon was free.

On holidays the villagers in the vicinity visited the camp and presented us with Korean cake and fruits, along with newspapers, books and so forth.

Their amateur art circles gave colourful performances for us. We ourselves also organized art circles. No work was imposed upon us and even if it was necessary for our own good, the administrative personnel themselves tried first and assigned us to the job. Even those of us who violated the rules of the camp were neither insulted nor punished and only subjected to our own criticism and, through this, rectified our own conduct.

Officers of the People's Army spoke to their own men also in terms of respect, far from beating and kicking them as the case in the Syngman Rhee's army. In the People's Army, men and officers were equal in many respects. And this was quite strange to me who had got used to "ROK Army" life. In particular, we were deeply impressed by their comradely attitude toward us, their enemies.

In April 1953, the U.S. bombers showered the Gangdong P.O.W. camp with bombs. As a result, eight P.O.W.s were killed and thirty-five wounded.

"The Goddamn Yanks! They know damn well the ROK Army P.O.W.s are here in this camp!" We were struck dumb and did not know what to think. Why should they intentionally bomb a P.O.W. camp?

Repatriation

The armistice in Korea was at last signed in July 1953. How glad we were! The bloodshed was brought to an end! With the truce, both sides agreed to exchange P.O.W.s. And we were told we would be repatriated to South Korea.

However, no small number of P.O.W.s wanted to remain in North Korea. But the camp authorities persuaded them to return to their native villages, to their families. For some time I pondered over what to do. Then, I decided to do what the camp officers told us. I should go home and help mother.

When the day came for leaving the camp, the Korean People's Army officers shook our hands to bid us farewell. They promised to meet us again when the country's unification was achieved.

The prisoner exchange was to start on August 15 at Panmunjom. On our way down to Kaesong, we passed many trains of the P.O.W.s of the Korean People's Army, all of them looked pale and lean bearing the marks of trials and hardships they had been subjected to for three years. But their eyes had a glint—a furious indignation against the enemies. And everyone was holding the D.P.R.K. flag and singing songs of their homeland—the D.P.R.K.

While our faces were ruddy and looking healthy but all were uncertain and worried. Things were puzzling! But I did understand one thing: The U.S. tried forcibly to detain the prisoners from going home, while the Korean People's Army persuaded us to be repatriated.

We arrived at Panmunjom, from where we took the U.S. Army trucks to Moonsan. In a make-shift camp for repatriated P.O.W.s in Moonsan we were striped of the clothing in which we came from North Korea. Instead we were given U.S. Army uniforms.

Women of Daihan Women's Society presented us with fans and the chaplain was busy praising the Lord. According to him we returned safely thanks to the Lord!

However, we were happy in anticipation of rejoining our families.

In Inchon

After a brief stay in Moonsan we were trucked to Inchon.

They put us in a tall brick building in Inchon. From Moonsan to Inchon we were well treated to make us feel we were home.

The day we arrived at Inchon an armed battalion arrived late in the afternoon. Guards were put at every door and they surrounded the building.

We were lined up in the courtyard, and the commander of the battalion addressed us.

"Our battalion came here to comfort you who suffered severely in the POW camp.... Hereafter, you are under my control. Therefore, you may move only in conformity with my orders. Any violation will not be tolerated but will be punished by military regulations. Now, do you understand?" With such words he closed his speech. But we stood in silence. The commander's face flushed a purplish red and he shouted: "I asked you a question. Do you understand?"

Then, there was a low murmur: "Yes, we understand."

The tone and manner of the commander suddenly reminded us we were starting the ROK army life all over again. Immediately after supper, if you call that supper, we were called out one by one to various rooms. And in no time the cracks of whips and shrieks shook the whole building.

Numerous repatriates were beaten and kicked most savagely. Here, too, informers were doing their stuff. Many former P.O.W.s were accused of denouncing the South in North Korean camps and of accepting Communism.

At daybreak we saw two dead bodies lying on the ground, which had been thrown out from upstairs. The same continued the next day, and the next.....

Many were killed and wounded. Everyone trembled with fear. I was afraid some calamity might befall me.

Some time later we were put on a ship. We were head-

ing for the Yongcho-do Island, a small island near the famous Kojedo. I repeated many times:

"When am I going home? Will I go home at all? If I can only save my life I will go! But, when? When?.."

Brain Washing

The ship we rode in was a U.S. landing boat. Its lower deck was composed of scores of small "cabins".

At a glance, the ship looked innocent enough. But another look made one realize it was no ordinary ship. Every room was on the lock. It was a dirty, small stockade.

The blood-stained scene started in the building at Inchon continued here on the sea. Many dead and half-dead were thrown into the sea.

The sun was bright and the sea was very calm. White seagulls were dipping and soaring. "What a peaceful scene!" I thought.

This land of ours—Korea—is always beautiful and peaceful like this. Who disturbed our peace and the beauty of the land?

Curses on them! Curses on them! But, we would live, we would not die! We would return to the North and live there!

Upon arriving at Yongcho-do Island, we were imprisoned again. Never before had we ever seen such a camp.

This camp in the midst of sea was really awesome. The whole compound was enclosed with four fences and in between there was a sort of barbed-wire entanglements. At the corners and in the central passage of the camp were high observation posts installed with heavy machine guns. And the surrounding hills were dotted with gun emplacements overlooking the camp.

"Why do they lock us up here? What have we done? Is it so wrong that we have returned to our native place?" I could not understand at all.

In the camp, we found such slogans, engraved on the walls, as "Go Home, Yanks! We don't want you." "We

stubbornly oppose the falsehood of so-called voluntary repatriation!" We knew right away that the P.O.W.s of the People's Army had been here. The more we thought about it, the more we resented our imprisonment. This time we were not under "enemy" supervision but our "friendly army".

Then, as they put it, the brain washing! First of all, there were lectures with a view to rooting out Communist ideology from us and then investigation of our life since liberation and life in North Korea. In their lectures they used nothing but slander and fabrication, and in the work of investigation the informers were given a big role.

Those investigations were preceded by preliminary inquiry, in which sticks and bars were freely employed. Their beatings were so severe that at the end of the interrogation nearly everyone gave an affirmative answer to every question, in order to get out alive. Two repatriates from our group Jung Tai Ki and Kim Tai Joon strangled themselves preferring death to such torture. Jung Tai Ki before he destroyed himself wrote: "Our fatherland will be unified in the near future. On that occasion, tell the People's Army of my death."

Rumours began to circulate that the camp was haunted by ghosts. It was said that so many men of the People's Army who insisted on repatriation had been put to death in a cruel way and the skeletons of these unburied dead lay scattered about the camp. Now, a number of repatriates had been put to death by the same method. And the spirit of these dead walked about the camp. Of course, no one saw the ghosts nor heard their cry. But every night the P.O.W.s could hear the screams of pain and agony of those who were being beaten to death harbouring hatred against their executors.

In the fourth month, we heard that the first group of about 1,000 soldiers would be discharged from service after completion of investigation.

On the day of discharge we were told that on account of a weekly run of the ship, the next discharge would be the following week. But there were no discharge during the next two weeks.

In the meantime, the head of the camp announced: "No more discharge. Instead, a 20 days' furlough will be given to those who want to go home."

In spite of the provisions of the Armistice Agreement that the P.O.W.s should not be reenlisted but be engaged in the peace-time work, they forced us to return to service.

Seeing Mother Again

Once I received my furlough, I hurried to my mother. She began to weep for joy and said: "Is that really you? I had given you up for lost."

"Mother, I know you must have had a hard time." Tears were rolling down my cheeks, too.

"It did not matter, but you . . ."

"Oh, I was alright," I answered. How could I possibly tell her about ROK army life in which I wandered between life and death?

"But, son, you are not going to leave me any more. Stay with me no matter what happens." To this plea of hers, I had no heart to tell her. I was home only for a short visit.

The very day I reached home we were short of rice. My 14-year-old brother had been supporting the family, but how much could he earn!

Early the next morning, I saw my sick elder brother going out with jige on his back. It was a cold winter morning, and I wondered where he was going. He did not return until long after breakfast.

"Where has he gone to?" I asked my mother.

"Oh, I imagine he has gone to gather fire wood for the branch police station," answered my mother. Not knowing what it was all about thinking that I could help him, I rushed to the station. There he was, but he was being beaten by a policeman.

"What's wrong? What happened?" I asked the policeman covering my brother. At that time I was in the uniform of a ROK army sergeant. According to my brother, he was beaten because he was late in bringing the fire wood. He should have brought it at 8:00 in the morning, but he was an hour late that morning.

"You goddamn bastard!" Then I let the policeman have it with all my strength.

"Yung Cho! Are you mad? Stop it, for Heaven's sake!" My brother was pleading with me almost in tears. Perhaps, he was afraid of what they would do to him after I was gone.

The time came for me to report, and I had to bid my mother farewell.

"Good bye, mother! I am sure there will be better time for us. Then I'll be with you."

"Mopping up" Operations

I went to Taigu where I was to report to the Ist Reserve Corps.

I found many repatriates had returned even before the expiration of their furlough. Many had lost their families or could not locate them. So they had no place to go. And some were in the same situation that I was in. But everyone was dreading the life before them.

All were saying they wished they were discharged. Then, no more of the army no matter what happened.

"It is not war time now... The war is over!" I felt much relieved when I thought of that. If the war breaks out again, how can I point a gun at the People's Army who treated me so kindly, just like a brother?

In the Reserve Corps we repatriates did not observe the military discipline strictly. There were so many violators that the commander was unable to beat them all. He was very much annoyed by that and tried to get us out from under his command.

Shortly, he succeeded in transferring us to the 3rd reserve corps in Choonchun.

About 150 were sent to the 5th Division in Choonchun. I was assigned to the Headquarters.

As time went on, my disgust with the ROK army life increased and all I wanted was to get away from all this for good.

A few days after I came to the 35th Regiment, an order came down to the Division to proceed to the region

of Mt. Chiri and engage in mopping up operations against the partisans.

We saw many engagements in Namwun, Kwangyang, Changsu and Sanchung and other places. The ROK army suffered more heavily in these battles than the partisans. The people there seemed to look at us with smoldering hatred and sometimes showered abuses upon us. The people were behind the partisans. Even under the strict military control there seemed to be close contact between the people and the partisans and we never heard of any partisans dying of hunger.

I was ashamed of my lot in this loathsome war against the partisans. Fortunately I was put in charge of a guard platoon, so I didn't do any shooting.

But what's the difference? Even though I did not take part in the fight, I belonged to the same body which was out to kill the partisans. And my duty was to guard those partisans who were taken alive.

The more I thought about it, the more unbearable it became. Who were the partisans? They were members of the People's Army and those who supported and cooperated with them. They might have disturbed the police, government officials, the rich and the landlords, who oppress the people, but they were always sympathetic toward the poor. Was there any earthly reason for me to aim my gun at them? Moreover how could I point a gun at any member of the People's Army who had been so kind to me?

I wanted to run away from all this.

But how was the big guestion. Could I escape safely the eyes of the Syngman Rhee police? This thought sent a shiver through me. Perhaps I could help the partisans anyway. Since I was on guard duty I was free to visit the detention barracks where partisans were confined. I could not help blushing when I looked at them.

One day on my patrol I saw one of the partisans lying on the floor groaning with pain. I guessed he had been tortured.

"Do you want some water?" I asked.

"Water? Thank you, give me some water, please." As he answered he gazed at me with wonder, as if he was saying, "You a man of the ROK army offering water to me!"

I brought him a cup of water. Of course, I knew what it would do to me, if I was caught. But I wanted to give him some water. For this cup, he said, "Thank you." I did not deserve to be thanked for such a slight kindness, compared with what the People's Army did for me.

All I could say was, "Don't mention it! You had a hard time of it, didn't you?"

"No, it wasn't too bad. The little hardship that I am going through is nothing if we were to achieve the unification of the country. And that we will." His voice was calm yet full of force.

The people are struggling ardently for the unification of the country, whereas Syngman Rhee and his cohorts are oppressing it by every means known to them. What would the unification of the country bring to the Korean people! Only prosperity and happiness! Thereafter I often went to the barracks to exchange a few words with him. Soon, however, he was removed to the Division detention quarters for court martial, where he made a successful escape.

Soon afterwards our division moved to Pochun near the demarcation line, with little gains to its credit in the Chiri Mountain battles against the partisans.

In Pochun there was little to do as an army. But the life was more depressing as we were ordered out to gather fire wood and make charcoal in the mountains to make money supposedly for promoting our welfare. But everyone knew what the money was for. It was to be pocketed by the officers including the commander of the Division.

In the meantime clamours for abrogation of the Armistice Agreement and "march north" became louder and the army was being expanded with tens of thousands of new soldiers.

The words of the partisan with whom I used to talk when we were in the detention barracks planted a strong

impression on me. Syngman Rhee's war cries brought back all the clearer the partisan's words.

Then I noticed an appeal made by the Supreme Peopl's Assembly of the D.P.R.K. at its 8th Session for the peaceful unification of the country. It was posted on the wall of a peasant house near the camp. Some must have put it up in secret.

The government of the D.P.R.K. appealed many times for the peaceful unification of Korea, while the South Korean regime was clamouring about the "march north". Syngman Rhee and his gang are not without reason suppressing the aspirations of the entire Korean people for the peaceful unification of the country.

They want to maintain the regime of the rich to exploit and oppress the poor. Could I support such a system as the one in South Korea? The answer was, "No!" I could not help reminding myself of the hardships my folks were going through. There was my mother who was quite advanced in years. My sick elder brother was almost helpless. The mainstay of the family was my younger brother who was 14 years old, and should have been in the school.

The people of North Korea had made great achievements in the post-war rehabilitation and reconstruction of the national economy, and their living standards have been greatly enhanced in the post-war period. I was sure this was the righteous policy for the people's welfare and a new war must be prevented. We must strive for the peaceful construction.

We do not want such an army, and it must be disbanded as soon as possible.

At last, I could bear no more. The shameful life must be given up as soon as possible and I should flee from the ROK army. But, where to? To North Korea! I must struggle there for the peaceful unification of the country with the people. Once I had made this decision I felt as if a great crushing burden was lifted from me.

On the Christmas night of 1954 when men and officers were drunk, I reached the demarcation line.

"Good-bye, dear mother, I will meet you again when the country is unified, and then I will be a more dutiful son to you, please wait for me until that day."

I talked to my mother as if she had been with me. Though I was going further away from her than one year ago when I left home to rejoin the ROK army, I did not feel so sad. I had been in despair then, but now I was full of hope.

Soon after I crossed the Demarcation Line at dawn I met People's Army soldier. I could approach him without any fear.

I told him everything unreservedly as if I were talking with my dear friend.

"All right, you have had a hard time of it," he answered.

"No, it wans't too bad. Every Korean who desires unification would do that much."

What I saw on my way to Pyongyang and my life in Pyongyang only convince me more I did right thing to come to North Korea.