

I Fled Communist North Korea  
As a Teenager  
And  
I Developed Myself Fully  
In The Free World

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## 2. At the Podium

- **Thank you so much** for the **INTRODUCTION** and it is indeed an honor for me to be invited to speak at the **Hayek Society of the University of Oxford**.

### 3 . The Beginning

- I was a born a fourth child among five siblings in the village, called **BONGAM DONG**, in the northern part of the city of **Kiljoo** in North Korea.
- The Heretofore unknown **City of Kiljoo** attracted world wide attention recently as the place where under ground Nuclear Bomb was detonated.
- When I was a child, I could see the City of **Kijoo** 4 km away from my house.
- I could also see the white smoke spewing out of the tall giant chimneys of the **Pulp and Paper manufacturing plant near the city.**
  
- I was 10 years old when I saw the noisy **Russian war planes**, wave after wave, dropping bombs at the Pulp and paper manufacturing complex.
  
- In the later years, I learned that the Agreement Among **Churchill, Roosevelt**, and **Stalin** at the **Yalta Conference** of **1945** let the **Soviets** to get into the Pacific War in early August of that year. **Japan** surrendered on **August 15, 1945.**

## 4 . The Beginning

- I used to think that the indiscriminate bombings were a ploy to justify the status of an **Ally** to occupy the Northern part of the Korean Peninsula when the certain defeat of Japan was at hand.
- Influenced by the family, I developed inner hostility to the **communists** in my junior high school years, but I learned to **act innocently** at school and the village.
- In **June of 1950**, the Korean war began. I was just 14 years old then.
- In **September of 1950**, there was a **pep rally** at school for the **War Victory**, but the rally began marching to the local **train station**.
- A train was waiting there with many army officers walking around with shining rank insignias.
- Among them were the graduates from our own school who had joined the Army earlier.

## 5. My Early Student Life Under Communist System: 1945-1950

- The military officers said that **patriotic students** should **join the Army** right there and then, and many did.
- But I was one of the few who did not join.
- The students who joined the Army were carried away in the train with the officers.
- I was a **marked student** from then on! I did not, and could not, go to school from that time on. I was not able to sleep at home. I was virtually a **“fugitive”**.
- Every night, my 2<sup>nd</sup> elder brother and I took thick blankets and found different places to sleep outdoors for fear of **abduction** by **security people** at dead of night.
- Sometimes I slept in the attic.
- We knew of many village people who were taken away from their homes quietly in deep hours of the night without a trace.

## 6 . Liberated Life and a New Start

- In early November **of 1950**, the **South Korean Army** came to **Kiljoo**, and we were liberated from the communist system.
- And the village communist party bosses have fled.
- In late **November of 1950**, the South Korean Army began to retreat, and the village was in panic. We had to seek refuge until the South Korean Army returned.
- I have decided to leave home independently for fear of being restrained by the family.
- I had the **last breakfast** with the family, knowing that I will be going away without telling them of my decision.
- I have never seen my family again except my 2<sup>nd</sup> elder brother, whom I saw later on a street of **Busan** in South Korea unexpectedly while I was on the move as a soldier in the South Korean Army unit.

## 7. My Early Student Life Under Communist System: 1945-1950

- I walked many hours on the snowy road toward South, and finally reached the harbor city of **Sung Jin**, some 40 miles south of **Kiljoo**.
- I saw a South Korean soldier sitting near a big ship warming his hands over the wood fire. I approached him and said that I wanted to become a South Korean soldier. I was quickly led to be processed as a temporary South Korean Soldier right on the spot, and then I was allowed to be boarded on the (LST) ship. I found many others in the ship who were already processed.
- Soon I learned that the unit I joined was the **Reconnaissance Unit** of the famous **18<sup>th</sup> Regiment** of the South Korean Army, nicknamed “**Skeletal Regiment**”.
- I was told that the **skeletal unit** was mostly made up of young people with North Korean family origins.

## 8. I Joined the South Korean Army

- The ship was full of soldiers and some refugees, and it began moving away from **Sung Jin port** toward **Busan**.
- When we reached the **Army Camp in Busan**, we received intensive training round the clock and we soon moved out **TO THE FRONT LINES**.
- I carried a heavy Browning automatic rifle (**BAR**). It is capable of shooting 20 tracer bullets in a magazine.
- We were always **WAY in front of the main forces** and we used to enter towns or villages just abandoned by the enemy, and found some village people either executed or taken away by the fleeing soldiers.
- In the **summer of 1951**, the **18<sup>th</sup>** , **22<sup>nd</sup>** and **23<sup>rd</sup>** Regiments, the elements of the **3<sup>rd</sup>** Division, were completely surrounded by the enemy forces, along with some forces belonging to the **27<sup>th</sup>** and **29<sup>th</sup>** Regiments.
- Failing to break out of the trap in spite of the heavy air support, we were on our own after destroying or burning all the military vehicles and artillery.



## 9. I Joined the South Korean Army

- It soon began to rain and I had to sleep on the wet slope of a mountain by wrapping my arms around the tree so as not to slide down the slope. I was soaked to the bone.
- The next day, I found a group of around 15 soldiers, including a captain. The captain asked if there was any reconnaissance unit soldier, and I raised my hand along with another soldier that I did not know. He ordered the two of us to go out for reconnaissance in a pointed direction.
- After 20 minutes or so, we were **met by an intense moment** brought on by the enemy:
- We saw a **blinking cigarette light**, and immediately heard a **rifle-loading noise** and a voice shouting “**Who is it! Raise your hands!**”

## 10. We Were Surrounded and Trapped

- My buddy quickly stood up and raised his hands in surrender. I followed his lead and raised my hands too. **We were now prisoners of North Korean Army!**
- The **captors** asked: Do you want go “**to the comfortable behind the lines**” OR “**to stay with us in the front to fight for the liberation of the South Korea**” ?
- I said that **I will stay with them in the front!** It was an obvious answer for me to give if there was to be any chance for my escape from them.
- My partner and I were led away.

## 11. An Opportunity for Escape From the Captors

- After some two weeks of time or so with them, one night there was an order to move out in an early morning before dawn. I was told to carry the bag belonging to another soldier who was on an assignment elsewhere. I was wearing a South **Korean soldier's trouser** but the jacket and the bag were North Korean. There were two “**anti-tank grenades**” strapped to the bag. (This bag turned out to be my life saver later on).
- Suddenly there appeared a small spotter plane overhead. Within few minutes, artillery shells bombarded on us and many soldiers were killed. A high ranking officer yelled out to say that we all must turn **RIGHT** after reaching the top of the hill for regrouping.
- When I finally got to the top of the hill amid the exploding shells on the hill, I turned **LEFT** and walked fast without looking back. I was walking in opposite direction of large number the soldiers moving in a hurry.

## 12. An Opportunity for Escape From the Captors

- I wanted to rest my blistered feet and I decided to soak them in the cold mountain water. I rested for some 10 or so minutes, ignoring the continuous sporadic moving soldiers behind my back.
- As I continued to walk alone on the **S shaped curve road behind a big rock** on a hill, I saw three soldiers sitting on the top of rock and I pretended that I did not notice them and kept walking.
- When I walked some distance past them, one of them called out and said **“STOP”**.
- **I could feel my hair standing up under the cap**, like a frightened cat, but I turned slowly in the most casual way possible, and said **“What is it, comrade!”** One of them appeared to be wearing high ranking insignia and the other two were just soldiers.
- The officer asked where I was going. I said that I was on a **special assignment**. A long pause persisted. Then I said that I needed to go right away and he must not stop me.

## 13. I Was a Prisoner But Escaped to Freedom (continued)

- He undoubtedly was conscious of the two **anti-tank grenades** I was carrying, as well as **South Korean soldier's trouser** I was wearing with long hairs. **North Korean** soldiers are not allowed to let hairs grow except the special intelligence unit soldiers.
- He let me go and I turned around and tried to control my shaking legs.
- I felt heat over my head and I kept walking in a deliberately slow but steady manner.
- I have always been grateful to **almighty God** for the **wisdom that He let me muster at that critical moment.**
- This particular incidence remained in my memory for a long time over the years and I was convinced that the God **ALWAYS** had a plan for my life. This faith helped me through many of the difficulties I encountered in my life, including a critical illness after the war.

## 14. I Was a Prisoner But Escaped to Freedom (continued)

- It became dark, and I was hungry. I saw a house and I approached it, and said to an elderly homeowner that I will pay for whatever he had that I could eat. He was boiling dry hard corn in plain water.
- He immediately said that “there was a **wounded soldier** in the under ground potato shelter”. I looked down and saw a soldier with his head wrapped with white gauzes tinged with blood.
- I paid the elderly man for the boiled corn and told him not to tell any one that I was in the shelter.
- I tried to find out about the “**ideology**” of the wounded soldier.
- He said that he was forced to **join the North Korean army** and that he was from **Sokcho City** of **South Korea**.
- He appeared to be a non-communist and I decided to **take him to South Korea** with me.

## 15. . I Was a Prisoner But Escaped to Freedom (continued)

- While I was talking to the wounded soldier, a gun was pointed in our direction downward and we were ordered to come up.
- They were two special agents with long hair and with automatic machine guns. They clearly were suspicious of us as defectors.
- I assured them with an innocent face that I was a special unit member and that I was responsible for taking the **wounded comrade** to “**our unit**” safely.
- While they were eating, I whispered to the soldier that we were going to escape by taking off our outer jacket and undershirts, as human skin is invisible in the dark. We left the place quietly with the clothes wrapped in arms and his rifle only.
- We walked some 30 minutes and waited until daybreaks.
- We were rescued by **US soldiers** in the early hours in the morning. I turned over the wounded soldier to them.
- I am certain that I was a man who made a big difference in his life. I may have been a recipient of **his silent thanks** during his life time.
- I was sent to **Mook Ho Korean Army hospital** for severe case of diarrhea.

## 16. I Left the Army To Find My Brother in South Korea

- In the Spring of **1952** we were asked to formalize the permanent commitment for the military service . While many chose to stay on, I chose to leave the Army and wanted to find my brother whom I saw in a **Busan** street.
- I hitchhiked military trucks all the way to **Busan** by asking about the location of the refugees from North Korea. I found my brother in one of the tents in **Busan** port area.
- I soon set out to find work while living in the refugee camp and I easily found night time labor work as a longshoreman, unloading cargos.
- This type of work allowed me to have free day time hours and let me prepare for high school entrance related activities
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# 17. Struggle To Become a Student in South Korea

- A prestigious high school offered “**Supplemental Entrance Examination**”, to attract donation by admitting the applicants
- I took the exams in **Math** and **English** and I was admitted on a high math score.
- After admittance to the school, I was asked if I would want to be a “Live-in *Tutor*” for a student.
- I agreed for the offer, and the student was the only son of a devout Christian single parent mother. As a **live – in tutoring** student, I became a part of the family and I left the refugee camp permanently.
- I was admitted to **The Seoul National University, which is the Oxford or the Cambridge, of Korea, in 1954** as a **mathematics major**. **However**, it soon became clear that my real interest was in either **Physics** or **Electrical Engineering**.

## 18. Going To America

- Under the prevailing system in Korea then, and still now, the initially chosen major field was not allowed to be changed.
- This rule prompted me to consider “**going to America**” to pursue my field of interest.
- So, I went to the **American Embassy** in **Seoul** to search for a college or University.
- I decided on **Oklahoma**. After all, the **Oklahoma National Guard** rescued me from my **North Korean Captors** during the War.
- My student’s mother, (whom I called **Mother**) gave me the necessary money to pay my way. I was one of 12 passengers in a **cargo ship (John B. Waterman)** out of **Incheon port**, and I was now on my way to study **Electrical Engineering** in **Oklahoma** on a tuition scholarship.
- When I arrived at **San Francisco** harbor in **June 1955**, I had **\$80** left in my pocket. That was the **only money from Korea** that I have ever put in for my education, living, and anything else since I left Korea while earning my **BS, MS, and D.Sc.** Degrees in the United States.

## 19. My Euphoria for the Academic and Professional Lives

- During the academic teaching careers (1965 – 1975) the research and journal publication activities were the source of my euphoria.
- I founded a company in **1976** to engage in the **classified R&D work in Military and Space Communications**. Some of the work and innovations were recognized, and I was elected to the grade of **Fellow** of The Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers (**IEEE**). This was a **Big Deal** to a farm boy from North Korea.
- I was instrumental in setting up **2G CDMA** technology based digital telephone systems in Korea in the early 90s, requiring me to deliver over 1,000 hours of technology lectures over a period of four years.
- Today, Korea enjoys the status of an advanced Information Technology (**IT**) country in the world.

## 20. We Should Not Forget the Past

- Korea could not have been saved from the certain grip of the communists during the Korean War had it not been for the **Incheon Landing Operation in October of 1950 by General Douglass McArthur.**
- Prior to the time of the Incheon Landing, almost the entire peninsula was under the control of Communist forces except the small region of **Busan** area.
- I found it highly **abominable** when I saw in 2006 in Korea certain ideologically misguided crowds attempting to destroy the **memorial statute of General McArthur that is standing on a hill of Incheon harbor.**
- There were many South Korean war **prisoners taken to North Korea** during the war.
- But I learned that, not one of them was ever released or exchanged whereas all the North Korean prisoners or spies held in the South Korean custody were released to North Korea without any **quid pro quo** when a new South Korean president was inaugurated 1992.
- As a former prisoner of war, I wondered about the “**ideology**” of the president.

- **Some Lessons I Learned**

- **So, my past tells me that when a critical decision is called for, it has to be made with certainty without hesitancy.**
- In any case, where would I be today if I did not make each of those critical decisions with clear certainty? I want to recall each of them here:
- (2.1) The decision **not to join** the North Korean Army at the **train station**.
- (2.2) The decision to **leave home in the face of** communists reappearance.
- (2.3) The decision to **volunteer** for the South Korean Army.
- (2.4) The decision to **turn LEFT** at the top of the hill.
- (2.5) The decision to **face** the enemy officer in the **bold way**.
- (2.6) The decision to come to **the United States of America** (where I was afforded opportunities to pursue education, business, and every liberty as a naturalized American citizen).
- **I was lucky as well in those instances, I am sure, for I did not possess the intelligence to make the correct decisions then on a logical basis.**
- **He, the Almighty, must have guided me.**
- This is a brief sketch of my history, and the inheritance of my children and grandchildren.

# Thank you so much

- For listening
- And I hope you have tolerated the long talk