

ON THE
DMZ

BY PAUL AHUJA



A U.S. SOLDIER
LEARNS THE TRUTH
ABOUT KOREA

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THE LIFE OF PAUL AHUJA AND OTHER STORIES

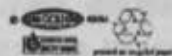


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I asked to go to Korea. I wanted to patrol the DMZ, I wanted to see "Freedom's Frontier." There, I was told, I would find the hottest part of the Cold War—a country split in half by a four-mile-wide "demilitarized zone" that separated capitalism and communism.

I had signed up for the Army while still in high school. After taking basic training at Ft. Benning, Georgia, I completed a 21-month "tour" in Germany.

My unit had been stationed just west of the highly militarized border of what was then a divided Germany. After serving nearly two years in the U.S. Army, I had a lot of questions about what the generals called "forward deployed U.S. troops."

President Ronald Reagan had just been re-elected and was in the early part of his second term. Tensions were high between the U.S. and the "Evil Empire," as Reagan called the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

My unit was an armored infantry battalion with approximately 650 men. We trained for war with a tank battalion. Both units were constantly conducting war games and live-fire exercises throughout West Germany. These war rehearsals were always very mobile and covered a great deal of land.

The tanks and armored personnel carriers we rode in weighed many tons and could travel over 30 miles per hour. During the war games we were told to drive the heavy vehicles as if we "were at war." The tanks and APCs caused a great deal of damage to the German towns and countryside.

People in the towns often yelled at us as we clanked by on their narrow cobble-stoned streets. There was the time one of our tanks turned a corner abruptly and ran over a parked car. It quickly backed

off the crumpled vehicle and continued on, as angry German people ran out of the shops and houses.

We were told that these highly mobile exercises were necessary for the defense of Europe. We were part of the half-million U.S. troops stationed throughout western Europe who would leap into action after a Russian attack. So our training, explained the officers, simulated a U.S. counter-attack.

The longer I was in Germany, the more I had a problem with this. From all I could see, there was nothing defensive about what we were doing.

After I had been in West Germany several months, my battalion made its annual trip to the east-west border and what they called our General Defensive Positions. The point of the GDP exercise was to show the troops exactly where they would dig in when the Russian attack finally came. This was supposed to help us "visualize the battlefield" and prepare us for the inevitable assault. The officers let us rank-and-file soldiers know that the attack could happen any day, maybe while we were up at the GDP. We had to be extremely vigilant.

The lieutenant in command of our platoon of approximately 30 men showed me our position. I was the lieutenant's radio-telephone operator. Besides having to carry his radio gear, it meant I was going to have to dig our two-man foxhole. The lieutenant gave me some final directions on clearing fields of fire and making a range card/target list and then left me alone so he could go position the rest of the platoon in their foxholes.

When the U.S. Army sets in a defense, it's a very serious thing. According to what I'd learned beginning in basic training, any effective defense would take days, even weeks to set up.

Each foxhole, or fighting position, has to be dug several feet wide and deep enough to stand up in. Then you build a strong roof from cut logs, cover it with three layers of heavy sandbags, dig in the phone lines between fighting positions, make radio checks with the rest of the defense, clear vegetation and debris from your fields of fire so you can shoot effectively, mark the limit of the various weapons, camouflage their positions, make range cards/target lists, coordinate fire between positions, lay minefields and concertina wire, dig tank traps, and place barricades.

That's for starters. As the officers used to say, "A good defense

is never done."

Once the lieutenant left to set up our position, I got to work. After I had been digging for about half an hour, he returned from positioning the rest of the soldiers. When he saw what I was doing, he began laughing and told me to stop.

I was very confused. Weren't we supposed to dig in? What if the long-awaited Russian sneak attack were to happen? How would we defend ourselves, let alone Germany? Wouldn't we be sitting ducks?

I told the lieutenant that if digging in would save my life during World War III, well then, I wanted to do it now, instead of during an actual attack.

He told me that if I dug now, I would give away the exact location of our position. To avoid that, we would only dig once the enemy began massing at the border prior to invading.

Wait a minute. Couldn't they see me then? Wouldn't I give our position away if I dug the hole while the Russians were pouring across the border?

I could actually see across the border from where we were positioned. On the eastern side the Germans had already set up their fighting positions, strung their barbed-wire and set up their mine fields. The tank traps were dug and the barricades set up. They had a defensive network with concrete bunkers that they had obviously been working on for years.

We had been told that this elaborate defensive network was built to keep people from defecting. Yet I could see just by looking at the fighting positions that the firing ports were pointed toward us, not toward the east.

This incident started a lot of questions running through my mind. If the East Germans and Russians were supposed to be on the offensive, why were they dug in? I remembered the training the U.S. Army had given me: "You never want to attack through your own defense. It slows you down, and if you clear a path through your defense before an attack, you lose the element of surprise."

The eastern side of the two Germanys was heavily defended. But the U.S.-occupied side was clear and wide open!

It became very clear to me that in this area of the east-west border, it was the U.S. that was really the one most likely to attack. In fact, our training and military posture was geared to this.

Now I had a lot of questions. I needed to find a definite answer. Who was the real threat to peace? Why did the U.S. spend billions on "defense" but have an offensive posture?

I had just turned 20. All my life I had been told that the U.S. was defending Europe and the whole world against communism. We were the good guys, holding the line against potential aggressors. But now I had seen an important border area, and everything contradicted this explanation. What was going on? Was my experience in Germany the exception, or was it the rule?

A "hardship tour"

I figured there was one place to find out. I volunteered for what the army calls a "hardship tour." One year in Korea.

I flew into Kimpo airport in Seoul on a civilian flight out of Seattle. A few of the passengers were GIs, but most were Koreans returning home. When I arrived "in-country," I was amazed by the hundreds of Koreans waiting in long lines, mostly for baggage and customs. But most of us GIs, even those dressed in civilian clothes or "civvies," passed right through customs. It was like we owned the place.

At the first of two in-processing stations we were given some basic information on Korea. An old Southern sergeant-major gave the standard spiel about the long tradition of U.S.-Korean friendship and how we were all "goodwill ambassadors" and expected to be on our best behavior. After that he gave us tips on venereal disease prevention: "The best way to keep from getting the shit is to piss real hard after you have sex, I mean hard, like a cow on a flat rock."

From there I was sent north to Camp Casey in Tongduchon. This was the home of the Second Infantry Division, my new unit. This division fought in the 1950-53 war and has occupied southern Korea ever since.

After spending several days at Casey, we were given our individual assignments. Most of the soldiers stayed at the camp, but a few of us were sent even farther north, to a unit stationed on the demilitarized zone (DMZ)—the First Battalion/Ninth Infantry Regiment of the Second Infantry Division.

On the bus ride north we passed through several small farm villages. I was surprised to see the poor living conditions of the people.

By now I had become accustomed to seeing Korean-made Hyundai cars, TVs, stereos, VCRs and other consumer goods in the U.S. In fact, I had bought a Samsung VCR from the Post Exchange store on my base in Germany. I had been led to believe that most south Koreans were pretty well off. Before they would start shipping electronics around the world, they would pretty much have all that stuff.

But from what I could see, most of the villagers didn't even have electricity in their homes, much less TVs and VCRs.

The farmers didn't seem to have even basic agricultural equipment. It was December, so no rice was growing, but the farmers were out and around doing various tasks, and what would be done with the help of machines in the U.S. was done solely by human power here.

The villagers carried tremendous bundles on their backs or on bicycles. They also pushed or pulled large carts full of things like ceramic pots. Everything was propelled with their own strength, not even by a horse or ox let alone a truck.

After spending more time in the country, I found that most of the rice planting in the DMZ region was done by hand. The villagers brought in part of the harvest using a machine that they cooperatively owned. The rest was harvested by hand—truly back-breaking labor.

When we finally arrived at my unit it was cold and dark. I couldn't make out how big the place was but I knew it was what the Army called "a company-sized fire base," so there were only a hundred or so of us there.

I was put in first platoon and sent to their barracks. It was a corrugated-metal prefabricated building with no interior walls. "Squad rooms" were formed out of positioning the squad lockers to create a small alcove. The bunk beds were crowded together and there wasn't much room to move. It reminded me of pictures I had seen of the inside of a submarine, except for the mess.

My new squad had just returned from the firing range, located only about 100 feet away. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. The soldiers were cleaning their M-16 rifles in the squad room. Live ammunition—even anti-personnel mines—was lying around everywhere. The barracks was a complete mess. They even had a dog.

This was completely different than my experience in Germany. There, the barracks were spit-shined and the officers only trusted us

with ammunition when we were on the firing range. We were searched before leaving the firing line by the range officer.

Perhaps Korea was going to be different than Germany. Maybe it was going to be just like the officers said, "Face to face with communism in the war that never ended."

Before I even got to meet everyone in my 11-person squad, the squad leader, a young sergeant, came and asked everybody in the squad for a white tee shirt. The USO folks were in the mess hall and they were going to silk screen a Christmas message on our shirts as a gift to us. It was mandatory. We all grudgingly gave the sergeant a white tee shirt.

He told the squad to keep cleaning their weapons and he would return with our presents. He came back an hour later with our shirts. Each one had a silk screen of the cartoon character Garfield the Cat. Garfield had a rifle slung over his soldier and the caption: "I survived Christmas on the DMZ."

Well, I hadn't actually survived any such thing. It wasn't quite Christmas and I was still a little less than a mile south of the DMZ. My unit wasn't scheduled for patrols for another few weeks. Before then I would get a chance to acclimate.

Every U.S. soldier had a Korean "house boy"

The following morning I woke up early, probably due to my strange surroundings. I looked around our room. I was surprised to see a Korean man going from bunk to bunk in our small quarters, placing nicely shined boots under each bed. He was our "house boy."

It turned out that every squad had a "house boy." They were paid a few dollars from each soldier every week to clean the uniforms and shine the boots of every person in the squad, usually 11 men. Here we were, just about the lowest of the low in the U.S. Army, or the U.S. for that matter, and we had someone to shine our boots and wash and iron our clothes!

Not only did they work as our servants, they had to do it for less than 50 cents a day per GI.

Later that day I met my squad's "house boy." His real name, it turned out, was Mr. Kim. Mr. Kim was from a town called Munsan about 10 kilometers south of our base. His family was very poor. Their only income was the few dollars each GI gave him every week.

Later, I found out that some of the GIs just stopped paying him after they had been in-country for a while. They bullied him into doing their wash by threatening to have the whole squad cut off his business. Mr. Kim tried once to complain to the lieutenant but nothing was ever done about it.

Mr. Kim and I became somewhat friendly during the year I spent in his country. His English was good, although it was filled with "Armyspeak." This probably made it easier for him to teach me a few words of Hangul, the Korean language.

He would often tell me that he had trouble understanding why soldiers acted the way they did. Why did the soldiers, especially in the lower ranks, become progressively more mean to him the longer they were in Korea? It wasn't until I was in-country for several months that I was able to honestly answer him.

The reason U.S. soldiers treated Koreans so badly was really quite simple. It had to do with a problem that originated in the highest ranks of the Army but showed itself in the lowest ranks. The officers had to get the rank and file to hate the "enemy." But the "enemies" in this case were supposed to be the north Koreans, while the "friendlies" were the south Koreans. "All Koreans look alike, talk alike and act alike—so all of them could be your enemy." If you replace the word Korean with the racist terms used for Asians, you get the full flavor of the officers' way of talking.

In formal training and in casual talk, the officers and NCOs (non-commissioned officers) fostered the worst kind of racism. As a result, the U.S. Army from top to bottom was continually inventing the most vile and racist names to describe the Korean people. The intelligence section of our unit also explained that not only are the north Koreans the enemy, they have spies. Any Korean could be your enemy, even your "house boy."

Before my unit began our month of patrols along the DMZ, we first spent a month in the Quick Reaction Force. Riot training was the focus of QRF. We spent many days training for the possibility that we might be sent to fight Koreans in the streets of the big cities south of us. Thirty of us fixed bayonets onto our rifles, formed a wedge with the point in front and the officers in the middle, and half-stepped forward as though we were slicing into a crowd.

At this time tens of thousands of students were demonstrating in



Students clash with riot police during a demonstration.

these cities. They faced off against thousands of south Korean riot police. The students were protesting against both the south Korean government and the U.S. militarization of the peninsula. They saw the U.S. military as the biggest obstacle to the peaceful reunification of their country, which had been divided ever since World War II.

We were never sent to fight the Korean youth, but we were kept constantly ready. Part of our training was to watch news footage of the student demonstrations. We saw the way the south Korean police violently crushed the protests using fire hoses, tear gas, rubber bullets and clubs.

Once, while on pass in the Itae-won district of Seoul, I got caught up in the final moments of one of these demonstrations. I was nearly knocked out by the tear gas, which covered the streets like a dense fog.

Katusa

When QRF was over, we began our preparation for patrols into the U.S. sector of the DMZ. That's when I first met our squad's *katusa*—an Army acronym for "Korean augmentation to the U.S. Army." A *katusa* is a Korean attached to a U.S. Army squad primarily for the purpose of providing translation. He did not participate in the riot training.

All Korean men in the south have to serve in the military. I was

told the *katusas* were from wealthy families; that's how they got the favored position of serving with the U.S. Army as opposed to the brutal ROK (Republic of Korea) Army. I didn't see the advantage myself. Although the *katusas* were seldom physically abused by the U.S. soldiers, they were the target of constant racist remarks. The *katusas* had their own squad room and only mixed with the GIs on duty. They showered late at night in small groups to avoid harassment.

The *katusa* in my squad was a young former college student named Ho Duk Young. He was very patient with the U.S. soldiers and seemed to be just counting the days until he could go home. Duk Young was new to the ROK army; he didn't allow himself to be caught up in the hysteria about the north Koreans being so close. I saw several examples of this.

At night we could hear broadcasts from loudspeakers on both sides of the DMZ. The north and south seemed to alternate broadcasts but sometimes both blared at each other. When Duk Young was asked what the broadcast was all about, he would say it was "continued political propaganda."

This was also his only response when he was asked to translate propaganda leaflets. We found the leaflets lying on the ground all around the DMZ. Both the north and south would send propaganda leaflets on balloons that would burst when they reached a certain height and would release the leaflets.

The print on the leaflets was in Hangul, so U.S. soldiers couldn't read them. We had to guess their meaning from the pictures. The leaflets from the north generally had pictures of fields, farm machinery, factories and cities. Those from the south sometimes had cartoon caricatures of the north Korean leaders, especially President Kim Il Sung. But usually they featured a small calendar and a picture of Korean women dressed in bathing suits.

"Propaganda City"

Soldiers on DMZ patrols get a unique perspective: they can actually see north Korea.

Other soldiers and civilians have to rely on what is told them about the north. The standard Army line is that the people in the north are hungry and wear rags for clothes. I had heard many times that in the north, "the people live in caves."

But from my area of the U.S. sector of the DMZ, I could look across the dividing no-man's-land and plainly see a large city off in the distance. With the naked eye I could see its tall buildings. With powerful binoculars, I could see people and cars and buses—all the things one would expect to see in a modern city. Farther off I could see part of another city, although it was partially obscured by a large hill.

The Army, however, was not to be deterred from creating its own truth about northern Korea. The city we could see in the distance to the north, the one that was obscured by the hill, they called "Old Propaganda City." We were assured that the Koreans had built an entire city so that people looking from the south would "think they had cities in the north."

The "New Propaganda City," the one close enough for us to see the people, was built because "the north Koreans realized the other one was too hard to see because they had stupidly built it behind a hill."

According to our officers, the people in the New Propaganda City were there just to make it look like a real city. At night they were bussed back to the north to keep them from defecting. Then, after the people had left, the north Korean soldiers would leave the lights on in the buildings and drive around so it looked busy.

Yes, the U.S. Army really told us that.

The patrols carried out by the U.S. Army along the DMZ are of an "anti-personnel" nature. They are for the purpose of spotting and ambushing "infiltrators." An infiltrator was supposed to be a Korean coming down from the north with some evil intent. This could range from sabotage to drug dealing.

We were told by the intelligence officers at a unit-wide security briefing that the methamphetamines bought by the GIs in great quantities in the villages or from other soldiers and called "crystal" actually came from "drug-pushing North Korean saboteurs." These "saboteurs" supposedly infiltrated south Korea by foot across the DMZ or by small boat.

At the unit briefing we were shown photos of a "North Korean spy boat." The pilot of the small craft had been "killed by the South Korean Coast Guard while attempting to infiltrate." The photos showed a body next to a small power boat, but the face was obscured.

The contents of the boat were described by the officer as "two



One of the heavily fortified U.S. guardposts in the DMZ.

automatic weapons and ammunition, hand grenades, 100 pounds of plastic explosive and 1 pound of crystallized methamphetamine."

A hundred pounds of explosive and only one pound of "crystal." At that rate, south Korea could be blown up fairly quickly, but the shores of the Korean peninsula would have to be covered with small power boats before the soldiers would get half the amphetamines they were currently using.

My squad conducted dozens of patrols. We never saw a single "infiltrator." Although we waited in ambush for many days and nights, weapons loaded, land mines set, we never saw a soul. No footprints in the snow, no sightings, no evidence that anyone was coming south. I have yet to meet anyone who did.

Some may want to dismiss all the lies told to U.S. soldiers stationed in Korea as simply cold-war rhetoric. But it is really much more. The institutionalized racism in these comments breeds hatred of all Asian people. More than 2 million U.S. soldiers have taken part in the occupation of Korea and been subjected to this racist "rhetoric" since the war began in 1950.

An even larger number of friends and relatives of GIs will never

travel to Korea but want to know about it. They will go to a trusted source, to someone they know was there. So when the officers tell the young recruits that the Koreans in the north live in caves and deal drugs, or when they laugh to let the soldiers know it's okay to use racist slurs about all Koreans, it has a ripple effect. That racism works its way into the consciousness of all the people in the U.S. who know soldiers—a figure in the tens of millions.

The real nature of the U.S. military presence in the DMZ began to revolt me.

Any Korean found in the DMZ was subject to arrest and search by U.S. soldiers. This made life extremely difficult for the residents of Taesong-dong, a small village actually inside the southern section of the DMZ. On each day of the week, the villagers are required to wear certain color combinations of hats and shirts when they work in their rice paddies or leave their homes. This is done in coordination with the U.S. Army, to help insure that the villagers are not mistaken for "infiltrators." Before each patrol, soldiers are told what colors the villagers will be wearing that day. Hopefully they then won't be shot or blown up by soldiers who are encouraged to aggressively patrol the DMZ.

Guardpost Collier

When a unit is not actually patrolling the DMZ, it spends the rest of the mission in one of two guardposts in the DMZ. Named Guardpost Collier and Guardpost Oulette after two dead U.S. soldiers, they are heavily armed and fortified observation posts. Using both high-powered binoculars and night-vision devices, the soldiers keep the area north of the U.S. sector of the DMZ under constant surveillance.

These guardposts were built after the official armistice ending the Korean War was signed by both sides in 1953. Their very presence violates the cease-fire agreement. That agreement "prohibits the introduction of military equipment into the demilitarized zone." Much of what goes on in the guardposts is also in direct violation of that agreement.

According to the cease-fire agreement, absolutely no automatic weapons (ones that shoot bullets continuously as long as the trigger is pulled) are allowed into the DMZ. In fact, every U.S. soldier who patrols the DMZ, or is stationed in the guardposts in the DMZ, has a fully automatic M-16 assault rifle. The Army gets around the auto-

matic weapons clause in the cease-fire agreement by pointing out that these weapons can also be fired single-shot by flipping the safety/selector switch from full-auto to semi-auto.

Heavier weapons, like 50-caliber machine guns with a range of over a mile and which can't be set on single-shot, are brought into the guardposts a little more discreetly. The lieutenant in charge ordered us to put the machine guns onto stretchers and hide them with our wool blankets before carrying them into the guardpost. This was done in full view of the entire platoon.

In addition to these violations, soldiers in my unit told me about times they had used a laser range-finder as a weapon. The range-finder uses a laser beam to measure distance. To the best of my understanding, the distance to the target is calculated by measuring the time of travel of the laser beam. The device is standard equipment on U.S. tanks and is sometimes used by ground soldiers for the purpose of reconnaissance.

The beam is extremely damaging to the eyes. The Army cautions its soldiers not to look into it or point it at "friendlies" for fear of causing permanent blindness. In fact, during war games that pit



The author, right, and another soldier relaxing on a Korean grave site during a break from the "fighting" in Team Spirit '86.

groups of U.S. soldiers against each other, the use of these range-finders is not allowed.

One of these range-finders was positioned in the control tower of Guardpost Collier, where I was stationed. The designated sniper in my squad told me it was sometimes pointed at Korean positions north of the DMZ in a deliberate attempt to blind the soldiers there. Other soldiers said the same thing.

"Team Spirit '86"

When the U.S. military conducts its annual "Team Spirit" invasion exercise in Korea, soldiers from the DMZ get to see the rest of the south. Over a hundred thousand U.S. soldiers take part in the "war game" each year.

It was during the "Team Spirit '86" invasion rehearsal that I saw much of the Korean countryside—through the open door of a low-flying helicopter. We would fly great distances, then get out and stage some attack against the "Red Forces." We were the "Blue Forces." Both sides were made up of tens of thousands of U.S. and south Korean troops.

When the helicopters landed for "the attack," no matter where it was, large numbers of Korean peasants would show up, seemingly out of nowhere. The kids would ask for food, money or cigarettes and the old women would try to sell hot ramyon noodles and Cokes. But the men and young women never came out.

When we started to maneuver, a large group of poor Korean kids and old women—sometimes hundreds of them—would follow us. They would walk behind us, climbing hill after hill. The women would carry stoves and charcoal and bottles of soda. They would follow us for miles, even though they seldom got more than a few leftover C-rations or maybe a dollar for a bowl of noodles and a Coke.

Team Spirit is the largest war game in the world. There would be a tremendous amount of what the Army called "maneuver damage." Like "collateral damage," maneuver damage implies a callous disregard for the lives and possessions of the people in the Third World. When tanks and other heavy armored vehicles "war gamed" in south Korea, tremendous damage was done to roads, bridges and houses.

Still worse, the tanks would destroy the irrigation networks that fed water to the rice fields. They would dig large holes in the dikes

surrounding the rice paddy. This could affect the food supply of an entire village by destroying the one rice crop grown that year.

Flares, blank ammunition, training explosives and other combustibles used by the U.S. Army in Team Spirit and other war games would often cause fires. Entire wooded hillsides and covered ginseng crops burned as a result of "training" I was involved in. Ginseng root is an integral part of Korean society, in both the south and north. Koreans have more uses for their ginseng than people in the U.S. have for aspirin and baking soda combined.

"SOFA clubs"

The colonial character of the U.S. occupation of south Korea is nowhere more apparent than in the "villes." The "villes" are the towns outside U.S. bases that exist for the purpose of prostitution. Nowhere have I seen greater oppression of women.

Houses of prostitution are known as clubs. Some are what the Army calls "SOFA clubs." SOFA stands for the Status of Forces Agreement that details the terms of the U.S. occupation. This "agreement" was arranged for the Syngman Rhee administration and the Korean people in the 1950s by the U.S.

GIs prefer going to the SOFA clubs because the women forced into prostitution there are less likely to have venereal disease. They are regularly screened for VD by U.S. medical officers and corpsmen. The officers say they will force a woman out of the club if she "gets VD too often."

The Military Police act as the bouncers in these clubs. MPs regularly go in to beat up and arrest GIs who have had too much to drink and begin to damage property. The MPs and medical officers also have the authority to close those clubs in the "ville" not officially screened by the Army. In this environment, payoffs and kickbacks are inevitable.

The existence of the SOFA clubs is evidence that the U.S. Army considers it a condition of its presence in Korea that thousands of south Korean women should be forced into prostitution.

The artillery base south of our fire base was surrounded by the "ville" known as Sonji-ri. The women in Sonji-ri, many in their teens, were constantly infected with venereal disease by GIs from three bases that housed several thousand soldiers.



Clinton at Guardpost Oulette in July, 1993. Here he threatened the Koreans in the north with "the end of their country as they know it." Despite the overwhelming desire of Koreans in the north and south for the peaceful reunification of their divided country, Clinton threatened that "America is here to stay."

The artillery base, the largest of the three, had a billboard the soldiers were supposed to read before they left base at night on a liberty pass. The billboard listed all the bigger clubs in Sonji-ri that served as brothels. Next to the name of each club was the number of cases of VD reported to the medical officers in that club over the past week.

This disgusting billboard was not meant to discourage soldiers from buying young girls as prostitutes. Its purpose was to guide them to the "safer" clubs.

At last my tour of duty came to an end and I left the U.S. Army for good. It had had a profound effect on me, but not of the kind they wanted.

Not what I expected to see

When I went to Korea, I expected to see U.S. troops bravely defending an embattled country. I expected to see Koreans in the south who were happy, well-fed and clothed, well-educated, and grateful for the U.S. military presence. In short, I expected to see what I had been told in school and had seen in the media.

What I found instead was that U.S. troops, with the full encouragement of their officers, harassed, beat, raped, blinded and even killed Koreans. Young men like myself became hardened to brutality, became used to exploiting women and low-paid workers, and developed an attitude of contempt in order to justify their actions to themselves.

I saw a people who lived in grinding poverty, barely surviving from year to year on a meager rice crop while the U.S. spent hundreds of millions to occupy their country with high-tech military hardware.

I saw a people who were not the least bit happy to have this huge foreign military presence in their country. I saw a people who didn't greet the U.S. soldiers with open arms but who, by the tens of thousands, risked their safety and sometimes their lives in demonstrations demanding that the U.S. get out.

My experiences in the Army, both in Germany and Korea, had developed my class consciousness. In the Army, there are clearly two classes. One, the officer class, does all the lying. The other class, the rank-and-file soldiers, does all the work.

The officers, usually from rich families, have college educations from West Point and the Ivy League schools. The soldiers usually haven't gotten further than high school. Many soldiers are in the Army to get money so they can go to college.

The officers get good pay. When I was in the Army, a captain, the second-lowest rank in the officer corps, was paid over \$40,000 a year plus housing, food and medical care. As a private, I was making little more than \$400 a month after taxes.

The officers get job offers from "defense" companies all through the period of their commission. The soldiers—especially from the largest branch of the Army, the infantry—find when they get out that they have few or no usable job skills.

The officers join the Army to get on the career "fast track." The rank and file join for job training, college money or just to get food and shelter, what we called three hots and a cot.

The Army, of course, is just a mirror of the larger society around it. These same classes exist throughout U.S. society. There are those few, maybe 2 or 3 percent of the population, who control the wealth of the country and with it the information media. And there are the rest of us who do all the work and create all the wealth.

A society split into two classes

My years in the Army convinced me beyond doubt that the U.S., contrary to what I'd been told my whole life, was a society split into two classes.

These two classes have irreconcilable differences. The ruling class is made up of that small percentage that sit on top of the rest of society like a voracious leech. They are the owners of the big arms and oil companies, the banks and insurance firms. This small class needs the rest of us. They need us to keep making profit for them in their factories and stores. They need us in their Army to protect and expand those profits. The taxes we pay out of our meager wages finance their high-profit war industries.

The U.S. military has always been the big stick of the ruling class. The working and poor people here are used to kill and be killed thousands of miles away from home. We are used to oppress the brothers and sisters of our class all around the world.

The ruling class can only maintain their outrageous privileges at the cost of the rest of us and our planet. We are the other class, the revolutionary class, the workers and poor and oppressed people of the world. There's no reason for us to be enemies. Our real enemies are right at home.

Only if we continue to follow the orders of the ruling class can they continue to steal the resources and oppress the people.

When we rid ourselves of these elite few and their thugs, working people everywhere will finally be in the position to wipe away their legacy of division and build a truly human society.

The author joined the U.S. Out of Korea Committee in 1991. The primary purpose of the USOKC is the immediate withdrawal of all U.S. troops and military equipment from Korea. Only in this way can the Koreans achieve peaceful reunification of the peninsula. USOKC members have traveled extensively throughout both halves of the divided country. The USOKC is an affiliate of the International Action Center. To contact the USOKC write to USOKC, 39 West 14th Street, Suite 206, New York, NY 10011 or call (212) 633-6646. Fax number (212) 633-2889. Internet: IAC@blythe.org.



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