

June 25, 1950

Fifty years ago I was in Korea. I was born and raised there until high school. After the Lee Dynasty which lasted 500 years, Korea was under Japanese control for 36 years, yet it still remained undivided. The country is about the size of the state of California.

When WWII ended on August 15, 1945, Korea was divided into the South and North regions by the 38th parallel under the agreement of the Yalta Secret Meeting involving the United States, Britain and Russia. It was the beginning of a Korean tragedy which lasts until this day.

On August 15, 1948 South Korea became an independent nation under Syung Man Rhee who at that time was the president of the government. North Korea established its own government under Kim Il Sung, their "beloved leader" of communism. It was Sunday morning and I was 19 years old. As I prepared to go to church I heard distant dynamite blasting sounds - boom, boom, boom - continuously, and thinking people are working even on Sunday. The morning service started at 11 a.m. as usual; however, the booming sound continued.

My home was situated on a hill, west of the city of Seoul. It overlooked the city toward the railroad station which faced the southerly direction. It was early afternoon after I had returned from church service. I was sitting on the upstairs veranda, reading the newspaper and enjoying the afternoon leisure and sun. All of a sudden a low-flying airplane came over the hill behind me, and started strafing at the Seoul railroad station with a popping sound and producing white smoke. It startled me and I was up on my feet. Suddenly, a second plane came over the hill. I noted a big red star on each of the wings. It started strafing just as the first one did. My reaction at the moment was "Oh no, not another war. Are the Russians starting another war?" Since South Korean's army was so small, I never thought the North Koreans had much of an army either and never imagined an invasion coming from North Korea at that time.

I turned on the radio for news of a war outbreak or something but there was none whatsoever. As the evening came on, I heard once again the booming sound continuing on and on, yet the evening news had no mention of any war or invasion having started. On that day, June 25, 1950 began the "Infamy of the Korean War".

At 1 a.m., June 26, 1950, someone was banging on our front door calling my mother, "Aunt, aunt - please open the door". I went out and saw my distant cousin, a Captain in the Korean army who was also an instructor at the Korean Military Academy, standing there in full battle gear. I asked him "What is happening at this wee hour?". He replied, "War has broken out. The North Koreans are invading southward and I am on the way to the front lines with the academy cadets to Il San (which lies approximately 15 miles north of Seoul). He said the cadets needed a break and were resting at Rotary (which is a big thoroughfare from the north to the south, not far from our home). "Please go to my home and tell my wife to leave at once with the children and go south.

Tell her we will meet again somewhere in the south if I am still alive. Aunt, you also need to leave the city now before it is too late". He and I ran down to the Rotary where cadets were taking a break. I met a friend of mine there. He had just received his commission as 2nd Lieutenant a few months prior. He was in full battle gear as were all the cadets. We bid farewell and I ran to my cousin's wife's home to relay the message.

As I was returning home on the main thoroughfare I was accompanied by many others who were escaping from the north to the south. They said "North Koreans are attacking the South Koreans with huge tanks. There is no way to stop them. Leave as soon as you can". That morning, June 26, 1950 I left Seoul with my younger brother Peter (his Korean name is Hyung Yul). We were the first few to leave from Seoul with the help of our neighbor on that day.

At the time the country's situation dictated our lives and I ended up participating in the war for 18 months in the Republic of Korean Army. I served in the front lines and in a guerilla mop up operation before coming to the United States. Our family lost my brother Peter (who was 18 years old at the time) in the war. He is still MIA as are many other Koreans. I was captured by the North Koreans at Ha Dong in the south Kyung Sang province when the north Koreans pushed farther down south. I escaped one month later from the Red Army prison camp. Whoever thought I would end up in the United States today!

Fifty years ago, June 25, 1950, is the day that will live on and forever remain in our minds. We are part of a history that cannot be erased and shall be recalled with infamy. Two million Korean lives were lost; as were the lives of 50,000 young Americans and soldiers from 28 other United Nations which participated in the Korean War. Young lives were lost, natural resources were used up, and there was large scale destruction which we do not even care to mention. The result is a sad one for we are still a divided nation 50 years later and have gained nothing. War, for whatever reason, is not for a civilized society.

We, ordinary people, both South and North, do not have any animosity toward each other, at least from my viewpoint. Our ancestors are from both the South and the North. I saw my grandfather for the last time in 1945, just before my brother and I crossed the 38th parallel toward the south. We hear about the efforts being made toward peaceful communication which might lead toward reunification, if it is at all possible. I for one would like to see such a successful result in the near future, especially for our posterity.

I hope to retrace my heritage in North Korea and see what has happened since 1945 when we left our grandparents and some of our relatives. I am sure many other Koreans would like to do the same. My sincere hope is for the end of the fifty years of separation and that it can be done peacefully in the near future.

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