



LEGACIES OF THE KOREAN WAR

Oral History Project

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Interview with:

Reverend Thomas Kim

First Generation

Born 1929, Harbin, Manchuria

Interviewed by:

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Japanese Colonial Period

My name is Kim Dong Hyun and I am 85 years old. I was born on February 22nd, 1929 in Manchuria, in Haerim near the Mukden river. My father was a pastor. He decided to migrate to China when he was forced bow to the Japanese shrine. Christians are required to only worship God. But the Japanese forced people to worship the Japanese Emperor who was a deified human. So we refused to participate. Simply put, the Japanese government tried to completely transform Korea into a part of Japan. They forced us to speak only Japanese. They forced us to change our last name to Japanese. Korean national identity was completely erased by Japan's effort. Korean people began to revolt against the rule.

In Manchuria, in my memory, people were not fully aware about the situation but we learned Korean language 2 hours every week. Of course, we learned Japanese as our primary language but we were able to learn Chinese and Korean. Yes, there were many Koreans living in Manchuria. There were Korean churches, there were even elementary schools just for Korean children. More than 1,000 Koreans students were there but there are only about 500 now. There were neighborhoods just for Korean people as well. When I was living there, the region was referred to as Manchukuo, not China. I can't remember the exact figure, but there were a lot of Korean people living in the Mukden River area. There was also a church for Korean people and I really liked that.

My entire family returned to Korea in 1945 sometime before the liberation. I lived in Seoul since 1942 to attend school. I attended middle school in Seoul. I really wanted to study in Korea so I attended middle school in Seoul. Korea was Japan's colony at the time. I was a Japanese subject and I was educated under the Japanese education system. When I was studying, a B-29 flew over the sky. All Korean students went out side to cheer, but no Japanese students cheered. Korean students who were caught cheering were suspended. However, I was not caught This happened during World War II.

I vividly remember August 15th, 1945. I was in Anyang [Gyeonggi province] when I heard the news about the liberation through the radio. I ran outside and sang happy songs.

Korean War Memories

I also have a vivid memory of June 25 1950. I was working at the Korean Communication department. Coincidentally, I worked overnight on June 24th. I was communicating with a worker from Kaesong early in the morning. Our communication abruptly ended as I heard the North Korean army marching to South. That's how I found out and I evacuated. I was a telecommunications employee before I was recruited to serve in the army. I evacuated to Anyang since I could not work

When we were living in Anyang my father was a pastor. But communists did not bother us because we lived frugally. He was captured when he went to protect his church at Gomori with other church members. Because no communist soldiers in the area knew my father, he was kidnapped. I think he was martyred in the North. At the time when my father went to protect Gomori church, the North Korean soldiers captured all South Korean pastors [and brought them] to the North. In the case of my brother-in-law [also a pastor], he was shot in jail after he was

captured. In the case of my father, I don't know what exactly happened to him. We only know he was captured. After that, I never had contact with my father.

I was caught by North Korean military when I was outside. I became part of a communications unit for the North Korean military. For 3 months, I was forced to work with the North Korean communications unit without going out. I worked and lived with North Korean technicians as I helped them out. That's when the North Korean military attacked and that's how I spent 3 months.

Then Navy canon fired from Incheon landed near my office. That's when I realized the U.N. military was coming and I was ready to flee. I began to plan my exit and I prayed to God for help. My friend named Ki Kook Shin also wanted to join. I initially refused because I was not even sure how I would get out. There were two North Korean guards standing outside of the office. When we walked by them they were checking other people who were entering. They could not identify us. We ran away once we got out.

At the time, I was old enough to be recruited so I instead volunteered to serve in the air force. Of course it was difficult to fight against fellow brothers, but I only thought about fighting against communists who invaded first. But because I never actually fought against the North Korean army in battlefields, I don't really know about the war.

I joined the South Korean Air Force as an intelligence officer. It was December 1950. I think it was the U.S State Department who recruited us after I joined. I was trained for a special force unit and I began to serve in it as an officer. My main task was to go to North Korea to collect intelligence information. I received four months of training before the assignment. I learned how to use every weapon available at the time. Those weapons included handgun, machine gun, A1 from the U.S. Marines, bazooka and more. I also learned communications technology. My job was to communicate once I got to the North. This is a personal story - I was at a campus after my training. I had 12 to 13 young recruits who were born in the North. Once, when a high ranking officer from the U.S. appointed 2 people to send to the North, both of them faked being ill. Although I knew they were faking, the U.S. officer was very disappointed. I wanted a chance to serve my country so I volunteered myself for the assignment. The officer hugged me and gave me a pistol, a compass, and a map. For five straight days I received intense training such as jumping from 6 feet. I was practicing for parachute drops. Once my departure date arrived, the officer asked me to give my pistol, compass, and map to another person. I also asked him if I should give him my watch as well but he said I can keep the watch. I felt very strange. When I asked what to do with my personal belongings, he asked me to bring everything. I jumped on a Jeep with my belongings. I went to Busan and arrived at a particular location. It turned out, the location was not for the parachute mission. The U.S. officer had assigned me to a safe position near the sea.

I began to work in ships providing supplies. I boarded a 60 foot ship going to the North. I once landed on a deserted island in Shin Nampo. We thought there was no one there, but someone began to shoot so we had to retreat. The Chin Nampo incident was very memorable since we thought we were dead. We could not see anyone, but bullets came after us. If any bullets hit our boat, our boat would have exploded. We only had bazookas so we shot multiple times. The

enemy dispersed afterward. It was extremely dangerous. But I was very satisfied with my work since I was contributing to my country.

At one point, we were returning from a mission from mainland China. When we were returning we were pursued by a Chinese ship and the British navy saved us. We thought we were meant to do our jobs and the U.S. military supported us very well. It was very easy to work and I was very satisfied.

Armistice

I was not aware about the armistice, but I could figure it out. We received nice supplies. Because we received such good supplies, even the CIA asked for our supplies. When the quality of our supplies began to go down, I realized that the war was ending. However, I was not aware of the exact situation. Because I delivered supplies under restricted routes, I never saw anyone dying until the end of the war. During the war I was inside the military ship most of the time, and my entire family lived in Busan. Yes, we moved to Busan from Seoul. Originally, we lived in Seoul but we moved to Busan during the January 4th retreat.

Once the war stopped I was glad to know that no more blood would be spilled. I thought about reconnecting with people since the war was over. I don't think I thought anything else about it.

Emigration from Korea

My motivation to emigrate to the U.S. was very simple. At the time my younger sister was living in the U.S. after marrying her husband who obtained U.S. citizenship. I just stopped by my sister's in Chicago during a visit at the time. Sibling petition was processed within a week. My sister just asked me to hold on to this petition, After experiencing the war I wanted my children to have better life, so I decided to come to the U.S. I came to the U.S with all of my family including my young children.

War Legacies

Since the war happened more than 40 years ago the war does not influence me. But I dream about it time to time. I dream about planes dropping bombs. Of course, the war changed me. I think we should not fight against each other and live peacefully.