

Horror stories have, for years, been filtering out of North Korea, detailing acts of such brutality that most of the world refused to credit the accounts. But now, voices – credible voices – are beginning to be raised, asking...

Are They Telling the TRUTH?

———— Is North Korea Practicing ————
BRUTALITY BEYOND BELIEF

Eye-Witness Accounts from North Korean Prison Camps

Publisher's Notice

Brutality Beyond Belief: Eye-Witness Accounts from North Korean Prison Camps

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ARE THEY TELLING THE TRUTH?

Brutality Beyond Belief

North Korean Witness Accounts
— Crimes against Prisoners in North Korea —

Foreword

In recent years, there have been a number of credible international reports expressing grave concern over the human rights disaster in North Korea. However, little evidence has been available on the issue due to the strict controls on all information by the North Korean authorities.

However, since 1992, some North Koreans who defected to South Korea have been informing us of shocking crimes against humanity perpetuated in North Korea for decades, massively and systematically. These witnesses include two former prisoners in one of the detention settlements for political prisoners (concentration camps), two former guards at several of these life detention settlements and a prisoner of one of the women's prisons in North Korea. Unfortunately, their eye-witness accounts have been in Korean and failed to attract international attention. Attached is a summary and an analysis in English of their accounts for your consideration.

Surprisingly, their detail-filled accounts have many incidents in common even though they were from entirely different social backgrounds and arrived in South Korea at different times. They did not know each other and were not aware of earlier allegations when they told us about what they have actually experienced or witnessed.

The information contained in this report is more than ten years old. However, since then, several more former prisoners from these camps have arrived in South Korea in recent years. We are convinced by their firsthand eye-witness accounts, soon to be published, that the shocking practices of crimes against humanity in those camps have never changed.

It is my opinion that further evidence and information are required to verify their accounts. At the same time, however, the alleged atrocities appear to be of such serious nature, perhaps the worst crimes against humanity in the world today, that I call for special international scrutiny to be immediately organized in the name of humanity. Your kind attention and support will be greatly appreciated.

I. Introduction

North Korea remains the most isolated country in the world today. A Cold War anachronism intent on maintaining its political power and stability, the government has enforced excessively tight controls on all matters that may pose a threat to its survival, including the dissemination of information. Accordingly, reliable information on the human rights situation in North Korea has been greatly limited, both inside and outside the country.

In recent years, however, the truth about the North Korean human rights situation has begun to slip out through the cracks of the government's tightly clenched fist. In February 1977, Amnesty International published an account of a former North Korean prisoner of conscience, distinguished Venezuelan poet Ali Lameda, who had served more than six years of solitary confinement when he was released in 1974.¹ His accounts included the death of Jacques Sedillot, a renowned French communist, who died in Pyongyang shortly after being released from prison at the same time as Mr. Lameda. Mr. Lameda's report provided us with a stark description of the atrocious treatment of prisoners in North Korea.

A 1988 report by the Minnesota Lawyers International Human Rights Committee, *Human Rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea)*, and a series of Amnesty International reports since 1993 have expressed serious concern about the human rights violations occurring behind closed doors in North Korea.

In August 1992, two former prisoners from Yodok Settlement, a North Korean prison settlement (concentration camp),² arrived in South Korea together. Chul-hwan Kang and Hyok Ahn were detained at Yodok for ten years

¹ Amnesty International, *a Personal Account of the Experience of a Prisoner of Conscience in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea*, AI Index: ASA 24/02/79

² These sites are officially called "Management Center" in North Korea. They used to be translated as "concentration camps" so that westerners could quickly understand that these places were tightly guarded and surrounded by barbed wires, watchtowers and emplacements like the concentration camps under Hitler and Stalin. These areas are now translated as "prison settlements" to describe their nature more precisely. Strictly speaking, they are not camps where prisoners are concentrated in barracks or permanent structures divided by gender in a limited area. Rather, they are a bunch of villages of roughly built independent sheds, a shed for each family, in very large areas. Hence the term detention settlement more accurately conveys the reality of the euphemistically termed management center. There are two kinds of settlements, **detention settlement** (there is only one such settlement) for less serious offenders where the prisoners have the faint hope of release some day and **life imprisonment settlements** where prisoners are detained for life, dead or alive.

and three years respectively at different periods of time. In July 1993, they published a book called, *"The Festival of a Great King, I~III."* They risked the safety of their parents and relatives in North Korea to inform the rest of the world about the existence of secret prison settlements in North Korea and the horrifying atrocities that are committed daily against the settlement prisoners. Their accounts were shocking but few were ready to take them seriously at the time.

In October 1994, Myung-chul Ahn, a former guard at several North Korean life imprisonment settlements, arrived in South Korea. In August 1995, he published a book called, *"They Are Crying for Help,"* to make the world aware of the crimes and human rights violations perpetuated against prisoners in the North Korean prison settlements. His allegations were consistent with the earlier accounts of the two former prisoners. This book was published about two years after the publication of the first accounts by Kang and Ahn.

Because the publications described frequent acts and incidents of similar nature, one might immediately suspect the possibility of corroboration between the two publications under a conspiracy by South Korean government authorities. However, our cautious and repeated interviews with Mr. M.C. Ahn confirmed indirectly that when he wrote his book, he was unaware of the earlier publication, which was a commercial failure.

There are also other indications that there was no connection or corroboration between the two publications. The authors of the two different publications had no prior knowledge of each other and were from entirely different regions and social backgrounds in North Korea. Also, the uncomfortable personal relationship between former prisoners and a former guard lead us to believe that the possibility of corroboration was low.

The strong humanitarian motivation and willingness demonstrated by the witnesses during the interviews also suggested that the South Korean government authorities did not influence the witnesses' statements.

Furthermore, because the concerned authorities of past South Korean government were widely accused of their own human rights violations, it is very unlikely that the government authorities concerned had any motive for attempting to manipulate the North Korean witnesses on the issue of their own weakness and shame for propaganda purposes.

In December 1995, Ms. Sun-ok Lee, a female prisoner at Kaechon political prison, arrived in South Korea with her son, who briefly served as a guard at one of the North Korean life imprisonment settlements. She was released under surprise amnesty when she had served 6 out of the 13 years of her prison term in North Korea. In December 1996, she published a book, *"The Bright Eyes of Tailless Beasts,"* a personal account of her experiences as a political prisoner. According to Ms. Lee, the treatment of prisoners was so degrading that few survived their prison terms

Therefore, the five witnesses from North Korea included in this book consist of two former guards at four of the life imprisonment settlements at different periods of time, two former prisoners of a detention settlement and a female prisoner from a political prison in North Korea.

Additionally, the US State Department's annual Human Rights Report, 1998, has also made ample references to the allegations of North Korean human rights violations.

II. Purpose and Methodology

The purpose of this book is, through these witness accounts, to shed further light on the continuing human rights tragedies occurring daily in North Korean's prison settlements and political prisons today. The information provided in this study has been collected by independent human rights volunteers from the five witness accounts.

The research was based on books published by some of the eyewitnesses as well as additional interviews for further clarification. We also made efforts to obtain independent statements and avoid leading questions during the interviews. In other words, no questions were asked like, "This incident happened to others; did it also happen to you?" Additional episodes, not used in the previously published accounts but which came to the attention of the researchers during the interviews, were also included in this collection.

The interviewers treated the witness accounts with skepticism, keeping in mind the possibility that the witnesses could have lied or at least exaggerated to make their books sensational. However, their allegations were largely consistent with each other and, surprisingly, independent witnesses spoke about incidents of the same nature at different locations. Therefore,

while the experts were not ready to take their words for it, it was extremely difficult for them to simply disregard the witnesses' allegations as fabrications. Nevertheless, the earlier publications of some of the witness accounts failed to attract public attention both locally and internationally because of:

1. the poor credibility of past South Korean governments in terms of human rights,
2. the world community's tendency to suspect the influence of anti-North Korean propaganda in the witness accounts, and
3. public indifference to the issue in general.

During the interviews, the researchers were sometimes confused and made mistakes when making references to certain details (e.g., names, locations, time, etc.) about an incident discussed months earlier. Almost always, the witnesses corrected the mistakes immediately with remarkable memory. Once, an interviewer asked Ms. Lee how she could remember so many small details of so many incidents. Without hesitation, she replied that because each detail was engraved with the stark gravity of life and death, she simply could not forget it.

More than a hundred incidents were selected from the five witness accounts. Their accounts were accompanied by simple drawings to make written explanation as brief as possible and attract the quick attention of the readers. The former guard, MC Ahn, actually drew his own pictures (with the exception of 2 drawings by an artist) while volunteer artists drew pictures for the other witnesses. These accounts are far from exhaustive but they do offer a broad overview of their experiences in general. Those who are interested in further details or prepared to assist with our project by translating their full accounts into other languages are cordially encouraged to contact us for discussion

There were over 3,000 North Korean defectors in South Korea as of the end of 2003, and new defectors continue to arrive from North Korea each year. We have been making efforts to identify those who were exposed in any way to the secret prison settlements or political prisons. Recently, an additional former prisoner from Yodok settlement was identified. However, he refused to tell us about his experience for fear of reprisals against his family still living in North Korea. He mentioned briefly that he actually witnessed security officers burying a prisoner alive in Yodok settlement. He feared, however, that his identify would be revealed if the incident was disclosed. Still, he stated that the

witness accounts included in this study were true to the best of his knowledge. Efforts will be continued to search for new witnesses and evidence for further verification and analysis.

The witnesses used for this study are available for interviews and further clarification for interested individuals or organizations. Any new information on these issues will be released when it becomes available to us.

Over 100 episodes have been categorized under the following subjects to allow for comparisons of several different accounts on the same subject as well as to demonstrate the systematic and comprehensive range of human rights violations in the North Korean prison settlements:

1. Arbitrary Detention
2. Poor Living Conditions
3. Poor Working Conditions
4. Poor Food/Health Conditions
5. Degrading Treatment and Punishments
6. Torture
7. Children in Detention
8. Executions, Murders, and Deaths
 - a. Secret Execution
 - b. Public Execution
 - c. Arbitrary Executions
 - d. Human Biological Testing
 - e. Forced Abortions and Killing of Infants

The categorization of incidents by location and time was discontinued because, for the purpose of verification and analysis of the stories, it was deemed inappropriate and ineffective.

For the sake of credibility, the stories were presented with as much detailed information as possible (e.g., time, place, and people involved). Reasonable efforts were made to distinguish between witness account (i.e., what they actually witnessed) and testimony (i.e., what they heard through word of mouth).

III. Conclusions

We believe that all the imaginable atrocities known to humankind have been put into practice in North Korea's prison settlements and political prisons. However, we wish to reserve comment on some of the allegations of extreme atrocity, such as feeding a newly-born infant to a dog, and suspect that the possibility exists for exaggeration, misunderstanding, or even falsehood. Nevertheless, we are convinced that the most abominable and horrifying crimes against humanity, worse even than those of Nazi concentration camps, Soviet gulags, or anything else, have been perpetuated in North Korea for decades. Although the twentieth century has witnessed terrible bloodshed from ethnic cleansing and genocide, political oppression, and religious hostilities, none has surpassed, we believe, the crimes of North Korea in terms of length, systematic practice, terror, and secrecy. We are convinced that the worst crimes in the world today are being committed daily in North Korea.

The allegations of the degrading treatment of prisoners and crimes against humanity appear credible, as they are consistent with the well-publicized harsh style of the North Korean government and the various international reports as above. The probability must be noted in this context that unbelievable crimes against humanity could take place under the present circumstance of utter denial of human dignity in the most atrocious North Korean political systems today.

It would be, therefore, inappropriate to generalize the conditions of political prisoners in North Korea on the basis of these extreme cases. At the same time, it would be equally inappropriate to simply discredit such allegations for the lack of undisputed evidence. Under the most conservative estimate, North Korea has committed and is continuing to commit grave human rights violations and crimes against humanity massively and systematically, undoubtedly the worst in the world today.

In the worst case scenario, the world has entered the new millennium optimistically but not realizing that in North Korea, the most blatant, tragic, and heinous acts of the past century continue to persist. We are only anxious to gather further evidence and information so that the North Korean prison settlements and everything that goes on within those cold fences will be exposed to the world. It is our hope that innocent prisoners will one day realize that they were not forgotten and that there have been those who sought to win their freedom.

Eye Witness:

Chul-hwan Kang

Former child prisoner of a detention settlement*

Mr. Chul-Hwan Kang, a former child prisoner in a North Korean primary detention settlement, was born in 1968 in Pyongyang, the capital city of North Korea. He was only nine years old when his grandfather disappeared one day and he was arrested and detained in the Yodok primary detention settlement together with his grandmother, father, uncle and a sister in 1977. They were released after ten years in 1987. In 1992 he and Mr. Hyok Ahn, also a former prisoner in the same settlement, defected to South Korea. He studied business administration at Hanyang University, Seoul, and he is a journalist of the Chosun Daily.

* Detention Facilities for political Prisoners in North Korea

Today, there are prison settlements in North Korea for the purpose of detaining political prisoners. These areas are officially called “Management Centers” in North Korea.

It used to be translated as “concentration camp” so that westerners would be able to quickly understand that the place is tightly guarded and surrounded by barbed wires, watchtowers and emplacements like the concentration camps under Hitler and Stalin.

These areas are now translated as “detention settlement” in the attached witness accounts to describe their nature more precisely. Strictly speaking, they are not camps where prisoners are concentrated in barracks or permanent structures divided by gender in a limited area. Rather, these areas consist of a bunch of villages of roughly built independent sheds, a shed for each family, in very large spaces. Hence the term detention settlement more accurately conveys the reality of the euphemistically termed management center.

There are two kinds of detention settlements, primary detention settlement (there is only one such settlement) for less serious offenders and life detention settlements where prisoners are detained for life, dead or alive. In both settlements, prisoners are detained without judicial process. The victims

————— A R E T H E Y T E L L I N G T H E T R U T H ? —————
B R U T A L I T Y B E Y O N D B E L I E F

are families of offenders who are killed or sent to political prisons for alleged charges of spy related activities. If the offenders are bachelor, they are also sent to these detention settlements.

Mr. Chul-hwan Kang was a prisoner at the primary detention settlement..

Eye Witness:

Mr. Hyok Ahn

Former Prisoner at Yodok Detention Settlement*

He was born in North Korea in 1968 and was a student when he surrendered to the national security authorities in 1986 for his brief illegal travel to China at the age of 18. His travel was out of curiosity. He was detained in the National Security secret cell in Maram for almost 2 years for repeated interrogation and torture and then in Yodok detention settlement (concentration camp) for about 16 months. After his release from the detention settlement in February, 1982, he met Chun-hwan Kang who was also detained in the same settlement for ten years before him. He defected to South Korea in 1992 with Chul-hwan Kang. He finished university education in Seoul.

He co-authored, “The Festival of a Great King,” with Chul-hwan Kang. He wrote another book “Yodok List” in July, 1995, about his experience in the above detention settlement and inform the world of the murderous treatment of prisoners in North Korea.

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Mr. Hyok Ahn was a prisoner at the primary detention settlement.

Eye Witness:

Myung-chul Ahn

Former Guard at Life Detention Settlements*

He was born in North Korea in 1969. He had just graduated from Agriculture College at his home town of Hong Won when he joined the North Korean army in July 1987 as a detention settlement guard. He was assigned to life detention settlements Nos 11, 12, 22 and 26 between 1987 and 1994.

He defected from his duty post at the settlement No. 22 in September 1994 and crossed the Korea-China border. He arrived safely in South Korea on 13 October 1994. He describes his experience and observations of the settlements in his book, *They Are Crying for Help*, published in Korean language in Seoul in 1995. He describes some of his own observations and knowledge in the following pages through drawings some of which appear in his book.

Presently, an agricultural officer in South Korea.

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Mr. Myung-chol Ahn was a guard at several of these life detention settlements.

Eye Witness:

Mr. Dong-chul Choi

Former Guard at Life Detention Settlement*

Mr. Dong-chul Choi was born in North Hamkyong Province, North Korea in January, 1967. He finished high school education in his home town of Onsong-kun in May, 1983. He was assigned to the Guard Headquarters in Pyongyang, 9th Bureau (in charge of operation of detention settlements) as a guard during May, 1983 to February 1985. His job was to route all the reports from detention settlements to the proper officers, draft replies and send instructions to the settlements concerned. Therefore, he was indirectly involved with the situations involving the operation of settlements. From February, 1985 to June, 1986, he was assigned to the cadet retraining center of the same headquarters which was located within the life detention settlement No. 11. He was involved with making training plans, textbooks ready and maintaining the training hall facilities. During this period, he was directly involved with some of the incidents that took place in the settlement.

He defected to China from North Korea in February 1994, and arrived in Seoul in December, 1995, together with his mother who was a prisoner at one of the political prisons. At present, he is a part-time lecturer on North Korea and operates his own food supply business in Seoul.

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Eye Witness:

Ms. Sun-ok Lee

Former Female Prisoner of Kaechon Political Prison

Ms. Lee was a normal gullible North Korean citizen, loyal to Leader and Party, and believed that North Korea was a people's paradise. She was the Director of the Government Supply Office for party cadres for 14 years when she was arrested in 1984 under the false charge of embezzlement of state property. She was subjected to severe torture during a 14-month preliminary investigation until she was forced to admit to the false charges against her. Eventually, she received a term of 13 years in prison at a kangaroo court. She had served 5 years and two months in prison when she was released in 1992 under a surprise amnesty.

During the first six months in the prison, she had worked briefly at all of the factories in the prison before she was finally assigned accounting work due to her background as an accountant. Her routine responsibilities included updating prisoners' list by deleting the dead from it and adding new arrivals to it, allocation of meals and work quotas, updating work accomplished, collecting daily work reports, carrying new work instructions to all work sites, and so on.

Thus, she had access to records of numbers of inmates and production plans, etc., and was privileged to daily visit all factories in the prison in both men's and women's sectors. She survived her over five years of ordeal because of the opportunity to walk to all the work sites every day which other prisoners could not and because she had relatively easy work in an office as an accountant with the prison officials.

She surrendered to South Korea in December 1995 with her son Tongchul Choi. She published a book, *The Bright Eyes of the Tailless Beasts* in Seoul in December 1996 to inform the world of these crimes against humanity by the North Korean government. With the help of a volunteer art student, she has produced the following illustrations to show the world the reality of the North Korean crimes against humanity.

In addition to the detention settlements for political prisoners, there are two or three secret political prisons. Prisoners accused of violating policies of

the party are imprisoned here through kangaroo court. Ms. Sun-ok Lee was a prisoner at one of these political prisons.

She recollects life in the North Korean prison:

“A prisoner has no right to talk, laugh, sing or look in a mirror. Prisoners must kneel down on the ground and keep their heads down deeply whenever called by a guard, they can say nothing except to answer questions asked. Women prisoners’ babies are killed on delivery. Prisoners have to work as slaves for 18 hours daily. Repeated failure to meet the work quotas means a week’s time in a punishment cell. A prisoner must give up her human worth. When I was released, some 6,000 prisoners, both men and women, were crying and pleading with me in their hearts to let the outside world know of their suffering. How can I ever forget their eyes, the eyes of the tailless beasts?”

After release, she could have stayed alive in North Korea and enjoyed her previous status as a senior party member because people all knew that she was innocent. However, she decided to risk her own life to inform the world of the Kim Jung Il’s crimes against humanity. She testifies that most of the 6,000 prisoners who were there when she arrived in 1987 had quietly perished under the harsh prison conditions by the time she was released in 1992. This shows that about 1,000 prisoners died each year and a fresh supply of new prisoners was obtained each year in order to meet the production quotas! She recalls that she was the only prisoner released during the term of her imprisonment. The only exception she can recall is a group of some 250 prisoners, Koreans from Japan. They had arrived there from Yodok detention settlement, she was told, several months before her arrival. On the day of the 30th anniversary of the signing of agreement between North Korea and Japan for returning Korean residents from Japan to North Korea (shortly after her arrival at the prison), they were sent to an unknown location.

Chapter I

Arbitrary Detention

There are a variety of facilities for arbitrary detention in North Korea, including secret detention settlements (concentration camps), located in remote mountainous areas, and political prisons. Most detentions take place without judicial process.

According to the witnesses included in this study, single offenders and innocent families of married offenders charged with spy activities are normally detained incommunicado in detention settlements without trial. They are brought here by surprise at midnight and remain missing to relatives, neighbors and friends and, eventually, forgotten. The married offenders are separated from their families for detention in political prisons elsewhere.

Individuals, charged with violation of party policies, are also sent to political prisons for heavy punishment after trial at a kangaroo court. They serve a minimum prison term of ten years. The former political prisoner testifies that the conditions in the political prison were so murderous that few prisoners survived the prison term.

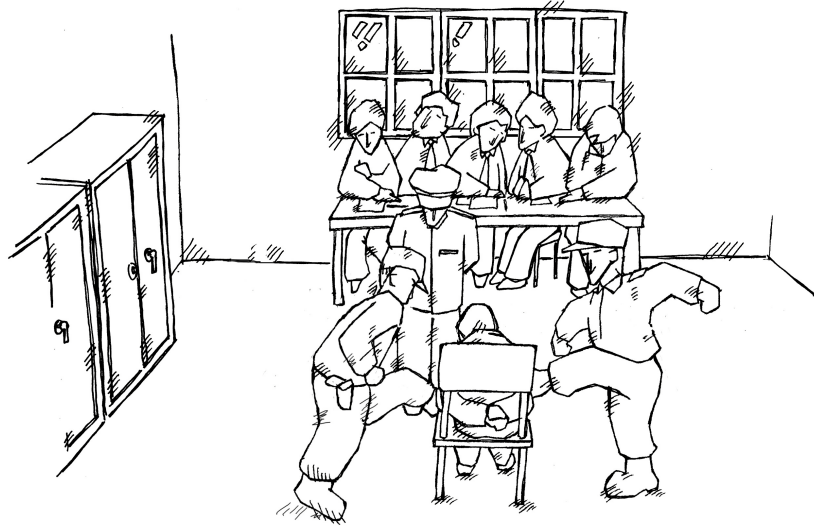
There are two kinds of secret detention settlements in North Korea. The first kind is a primary detention settlement for less serious offenders who are detained indefinitely without trial but at least have the possibility of being released some day. There is only one such settlement in North Korea – “Yodok Settlement or Settlement No. 15.” The two former prisoners, whose accounts are included in this research, spent time in this settlement.

The second kind includes over ten life detention settlements where prisoners are detained for life without due process. No prisoners have ever been released from these settlements, dead or alive. The two former guards, whose accounts are included in this research, were assigned to several of these life detention settlements.

The settlements are enclosed by tall, electrified barbed wire fences, encampments, hidden traps, and other security devices at strategic locations to prevent prisoners from escaping. One of the former guards describes the security facilities at these prison settlements while one of the former prisoners remembered how the main entrance gate to one of the settlements looked at the time of his release.

North Korean Kangaroo Court

Experienced by Ms. SO Lee, former political prisoner



The preliminary trial was set for 10:00 AM at my former office, where I worked for 17 years as a loyal party member. I asked for my husband before entering the court. “Your husband is not here. Don’t ever try to meet anybody else, understand?” was the reply. Don’t I even get to see my husband on the day of my trial?

I met my lawyer for the first time in the courtroom. The court consisted of a judge, prosecutor, lawyer and a two-member “jury.” My interrogator was there also. The judge made a few remarks about the charges against me and asked me if I accepted the charge.

I had promised the interrogators earlier that I would accept the charge, but I simply could not control myself at that moment. “Your Honor, I have neither embezzled government property nor violated any of the party policy. Never, never! I am innocent. Please allow me a fair investigation.” The two guards at my sides shouted, “You must be crazy!” and started to kick me in the knees. At that moment, the judge declared the preliminary trial closed. The trial lasted less than 15 minutes!

It was very cold on November 9, 1987, my trial day. In the morning, the

interrogators repeated their warning, “You better be careful what you say in court or your husband and son will be in serious trouble. Remember that!” I did not know that my husband, in fact, had already been exiled internally! However, I was firmly determined to do what I could to prove my innocence to the party officials and my husband. I was still so naïve and excited by the idea of meeting my husband and telling him loudly, in the court room, all about my sufferings.

After the preliminary trial which lasted less than 15 minutes, I was detained at the police cell for the formal trial until five o’clock in the afternoon. I was given no water and food. The interrogators persistently harassed me with the same threat, “What about your husband and son? If you accept the charge in court, they will be safe. Otherwise, you know what’s going to happen to them.”

At court in the afternoon, I had to say yes when the judge asked me, “Do you accept the charges against you?” There was no evidence produced nor any witnesses against me. The judge made no reference to the absence of evidence and witnesses and committed me to a 13-year imprisonment for “a violation of the government commercial policy and embezzlement of state property.” The lawyer remained silent throughout the entire court proceeding. The mere formality of sending me to prison was thus over under the pretext of a trial.

A Christian Family Detained for Life for Praying

Witnessed by CH Kang, Former Child Prisoner of Detention Settlement



There was a Christian woman from the city of Sariwon in the settlement. She had been arrested for explaining to a neighbor about a book she was reading. She was forced to divorce her husband and live in the settlement with their two young daughters.

One evening during an ideology session, a security officer cautioned her, "You bitch, listen carefully to what I say. If you are caught praying again, it's the end for you, got it?" Then, the security officer turned towards the other prisoners and said, "This bitch is crazy!" At that time, I thought that praying was jail-breaking or some other serious offence.

At dawn a few days later, we heard distraught screaming and the angry voices of security officers. I stopped my breakfast and ran outside. The Christian woman and her two little daughters were being beaten brutally by the security officers. In front of her house, there was a Russian truck, the same type of truck that brought us here. There were other prisoners in front of me who were also grieving for them. While they continued to scream, they were dumped onto the truck like cargo. The truck quickly disappeared from our sight. This is how I saw them last. None of us said anything but we all realized that they were headed for Yongpyong for life detention.

She always had a smile for other prisoners, a very rare quality in the settlement. She often hummed strange songs. Later, I was told that she believed in a superstitious religion called Christianity. I was also told that she

does a strange thing called praying. None of us knew what prayer was about. She said to herself, “O, Lord, my Lord,” when the work was very difficult. These words, of course, were strange to other prisoners. Except for this, she was like everyone else in the settlement.

Once, there was a big quarrel between one of her daughters and my sister over food ration. This was very common among the prisoners because the ration was not enough and usually the stronger got the better of it. The mother took the corn back from her daughter’s hand and quietly handed it to my sister. Her daughter protested, “Mom, then what do I eat?” The woman started to tell her tearful daughter a very strange story. “Once upon a time, God’s son was born in a country far away. He taught us, “Don’t worry about having food and clothing because God will take care of us.” She comforted her crying daughter as they both walked away.

The security officers were very tough on her and watched her very closely, paying close attention to every word she said. Naturally, she was given the most difficult work. One day during an ideology session, security officers ordered her to criticize herself. They said that they caught her committing a crime red-handed the previous night.

When we returned home from the ideology session that night, my father and uncle continued to talk about the woman.

“I am afraid something is going to happen to her,” said my father.

“I have the same feeling too. That security officer sure had his suspicious eyes on her,” my uncle concurred.

“Well, she is pretty but she probably isn’t going to make it easy for him, I guess,” said my father.

“The s.o.b.s! They forced her to divorce her husband and brought them here. Isn’t that enough? Why do they want to punish her more?” my father added.

“Don’t you know, my brother, that security officers are beasts, not human beings. They do everything according to their wills, don’t they?” my uncle responded.

A North Korean Miner's Wife

Witnessed by Ms. SO Lee, former political prisoner



When She Was Arrested



After Six Months in Prison

Jong-ok Kim, about 45, wife of a miner, Hweryong district, was arrested for stealing some 20 liters of corn from a nearby cooperative farm when her children were starving at home in the spring of 1987. During the trial, the judge scolded her for stealing. There was a microphone in front of her but she did not know what it was. She murmured in a very low voice, "Of course, I know stealing is bad. Why would I steal if the food ration had continued? How awful this country is!" Her complaint reached the judge through the microphone. He was furious and committed her to 15 years of hard labor in prison for "criticizing the party policy." She died in the autumn of 1992 of undernourishment and diarrhea, after five years in prison.

She was detained at the cell next to me during the police investigation but we did not see each other at that time because the movement of prisoners was always so strictly controlled that prisoners do not meet each other. The guards in the jails, however, always felt bored when on duty for hours and they would normally ask inmates for all kinds of questions, "Hey you! What's your name? Where are you from? What's the Charge? etc." I overheard their conversations with other inmates and knew about them and, in the same way, the other inmates knew about me even though we did not meet.

One day in prison in 1988, I was carrying work instructions as usual when a prisoner suddenly stopped me by pulling my clothes and whispered to me, "Aren't you the Supply Manager from Onsong District?" Speaking to each

other was against prison regulations. I was scared and I moved off without a word. The next day, when there was no prison guard around, I asked her, “How did you know about me?” This is how we met in the prison.

She worked at the prison leather factory. She had been in prison for about 5 years when, one day in the autumn of 1992, she became too weak to meet her work quota. She received reduced meals for punishment and began to be weaker with less food. She also had serious loose bowels and felt so thirsty, but there was no water for prisoners. She was so desperate that she drank the dirty water from the bucket where floor mops had been washed several times. The next day, she dropped to the floor while trying to make a leather bag. She did not move when prison guards kicked her hard. She was dead. They had her dead body wrapped in a straw mat and carried away.

One day in 1994, while I was hiding in China waiting for an opportunity to come to Seoul, I was listening to a mid-night radio broadcast from Seoul which announced the arrival in Seoul of two young brothers from North Korea. Their names rang in my ears. When I was undergoing intelligence clearance in South Korea, I was able to confirm that the two brothers were indeed the sons of Sung-ok Choi.

When I was preparing to meet her sons in Seoul, the intelligence officers advised me not to tell them about their mother’s death, because the boys were in a very fragile condition emotionally. So, I did not tell them about their mother’s death when I first met them. One day in April, 1998, they visited me and told me that they had heard from their relatives in China that their mother had died, so I had to confirm the information. They are in South Korea now and visit me regularly.

Public Detention Facilities in North Korea

Reported by DC Choi, a former detention settlement guard

There are 4 types of prisons in North Korea: Forced Labor Center, Labor Training Center, Labor Prison and Prison. The treatment of prisoners is seriously degrading at all facilities. These detention facilities are for non-political offenders.

Forced Labor Center: Those who travel without a pass, are absent from work without permission, commit minor offenses, or petty theft are detained here for 1 to 6 months without judiciary process. After they have fulfilled the penalty terms, they are allowed to return to their previous work.

Labor Training Center: Those detained include sex offenders. They are detained here for 6 months to one year without judiciary process. They are allowed to return to their previous work after serving their sentences.

Serious offenders who are sentenced to more than a year at a kangaroo court are sent to Labor Prisons or ordinary Provincial Prisons according to the seriousness of the offense. The prisoners are deprived of all rights and seriously discriminated against after their release.



(Additionally, secret detention facilities for political prisoners include a primary detention settlement, a score of life detention settlements and three political prisons)

North Korean Life Detention Settlements

Reported by Mr. DC Choi, former detention settlement guard

While I was working for the State Security Ministry, from May 1983 to June 1986, there was a total of 11 detention settlements under operation by the 9th Bureau. Usually, they were situated in extensive mountainous areas. The settlements are considered to be enemy districts and each village within a settlement consists of 300 to 400 households. The largest settlements include Nos. 14 and 15, which accommodate 40,000 to 50,000 prisoners each. The total number of prisoners at these settlements was about 200,000. I was told later that some of the settlements were closed and others relocated to avoid international attention. The 9th bureau was changed to the 7th bureau around 1988.

In the 1950s when the settlements were created, they were for the detention of political rivals who were purged. In the 1960s, the victims included the families of defectors to South Korea, religious leaders, landlords and discontent Koreans repatriated from Japan. In the 1980s, those detained included those who listened to South Korean radio broadcasts or criticized North Korean policies and those students and workers from overseas who spread word about life in other countries. Entire families, up to and including the third generation, would be detained for the offense of one family member.



People who listen to South Korean radio broadcasts or openly criticize the policy of the party are openly arrested for the purpose of intimidating others. Those who were suspected of collaboration with South Korea during the Korean War and the families of defectors were arrested secretly at night. In this

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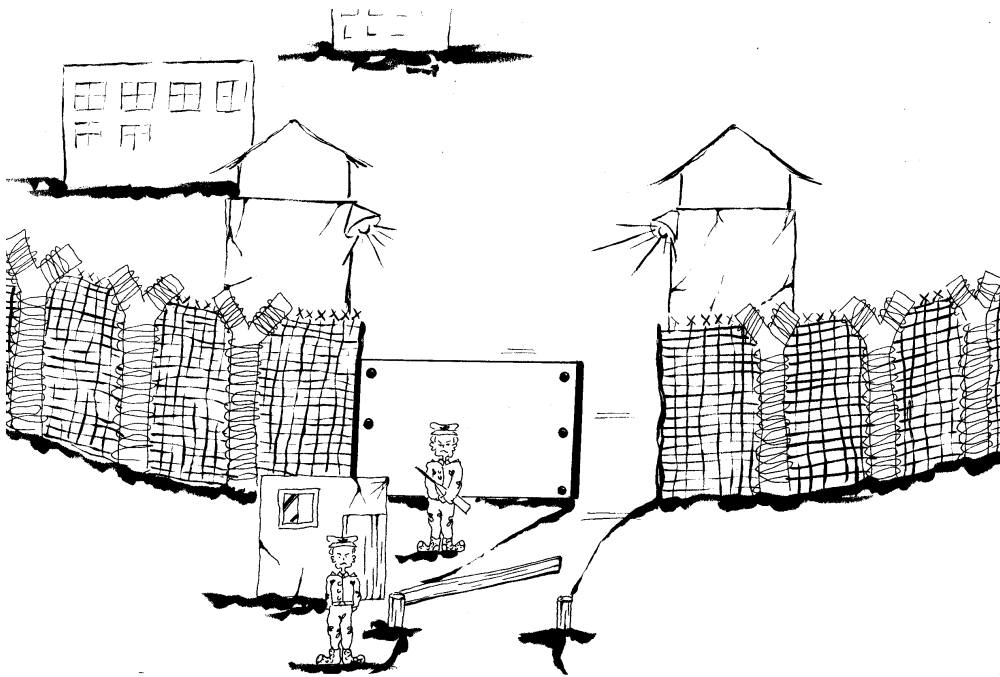
case, a common practice is that the offender is sent on official trip during which time he is arrested. An agriculture specialist at a research institute in Chongjin city was told to take a field trip to a farm in the highlands for the introduction of a new corn variety.

On the way, he did not know that those accompanying him were security officers and exchanged jokes with them. He ended up in a detention settlement, not the farm.

Main Gate to Detention Settlement

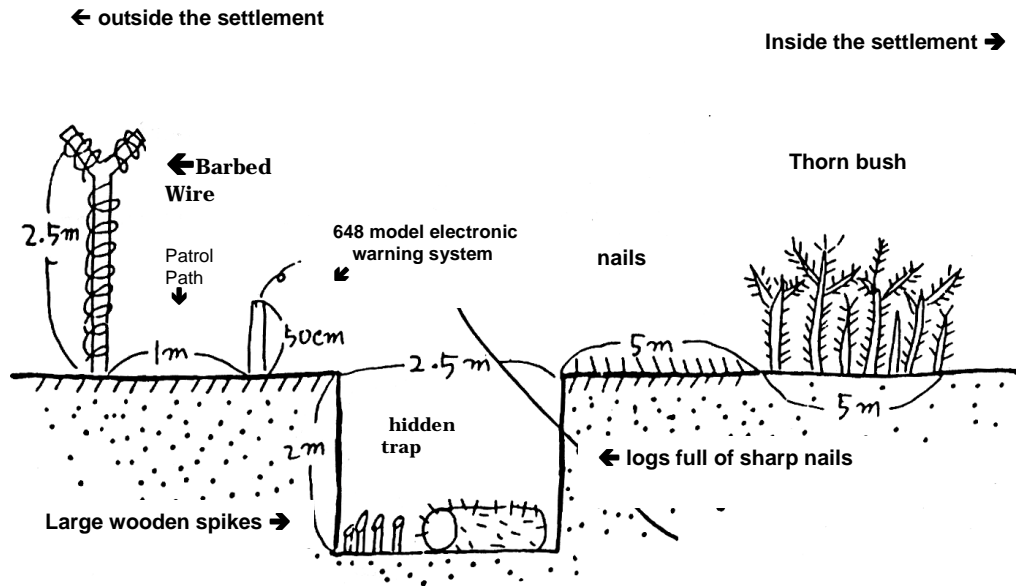
Witnessed by Mr. Hyok Ahn, former detention settlement prisoner

The main gate to Yodok detention settlement. I saw it when I first arrived here in 1987 and when I was released in 1989.



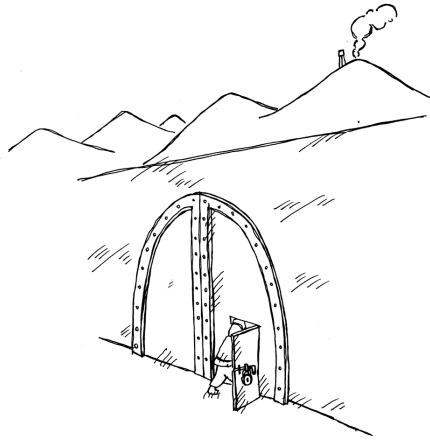
Security Devices at All Detention Settlements

Witnessed by Mr. MC Ahn, former detention settlements guard



Underground Emergency Execution Chamber

Witnessed by Sun-ok Lee, a former prisoner of a political prison

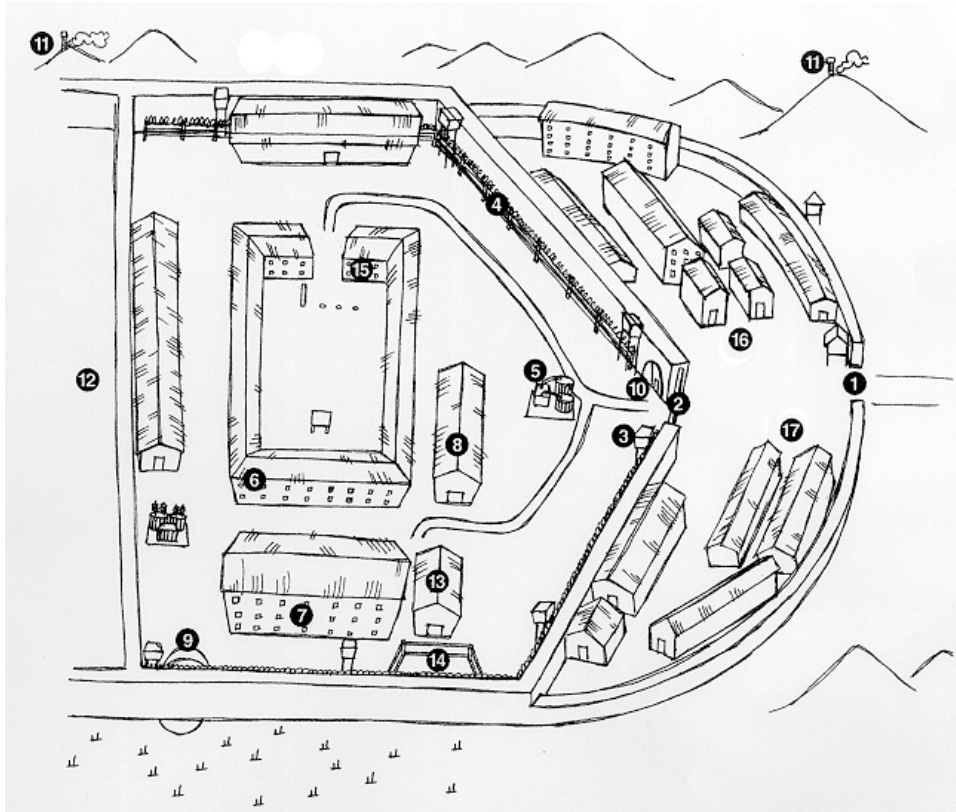


Near the prison gate, there is a huge iron gate that leads to the underground tunnels. Guards often remind the prisoners that their lives are considered disposable and that they can be collectively annihilated at any time in the underground tunnels. The tunnels, of course, can be blasted at any time, leaving no traces of massacre. It is said that the underground space is so large that it can accommodate several thousand prisoners at one time. The male prisoners' sector has a huge underground factory for the production of ammunition and weapons. I have never been to the underground weapon factory myself, but I have frequently heard prison officials talking about it. I do not know whether the underground tunnels in the women's sector are connected to the men's underground factory.

I often saw fumes coming from a distant chimney atop a nearby hill. I was told that the chimney is one of the ventilators for the underground tunnels.

A Bird's Eye View of Kaechon Women's Prison

Witnessed by Ms. SO Lee, former female political prisoner



1. Main Gate
2. Entrance Gate
3. Watch Tower
4. Gate to underground tunnel
5. Power Generator
6. Factories
7. Cells for Prisoners
8. Rubber Factory (ii)
9. Dung Pool
10. Gate to Underground Square

11. Chimney of Underground Square
12. Kaechon Men's Prison
13. Rubber Factory (i)
14. Pigsties
15. Administration Offices
16. Prison Administration Sector
17. Guard Barracks

Guards Instructed to Be Merciless Towards Prisoners

Experienced by Mr DC Choi, former detention settlement guard

Right after my graduation from a local high school in 1983, I was selected to be considered to work for the State Security Bureau because of my good family background. After I passed the examinations and aptitude tests, I was appointed to the State Security 9th Bureau, which is called the farm management bureau and responsible for the operation of the detention settlements. I was assigned to deskwork at the Guard Unit of the Guard Regiment Headquarters during May 1983 ~ Feb. 1985 and at the Cadet Training Corps, located inside settlement No. 11 from Feb. 1985 to June 1986.

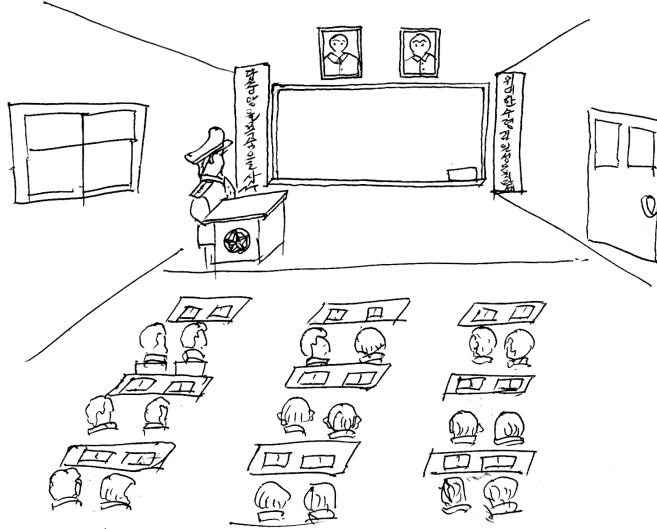
During the first few months in the guard unit, we were repeatedly trained not to treat prisoners as human beings because they were our foes and traitors who sucked the blood and sweat of people. We were also cautioned that if we ever showed them sympathy, we would be treated as political prisoners in return. We were authorized to kill any of them at any time. Likewise, we were told to shoot to kill if they ran away, to never talk to them privately, and to be armed when we were near them. We were told to never disclose any knowledge of the detention settlements.

In reality, I felt sorry for each prisoner as one human being to another, but I felt scared to show them any sympathy.



You May Beat or Shoot Prisoners to Death Anywhere, Any Time and for Any Reason!

Witnessed by Mr. MC Ahn, former guard of Detention Settlements



From the beginning and throughout the eight years of my military service, the instructing officers at all levels always cautioned us against political prisoners.

“When you are on guard duty, you must always remember that the political prisoners intend to seek revenge on you, riot, overthrow our system. Therefore, you must be always on the alert. Under no circumstances should you treat them like human beings or help them. Your negligence of duty as a guard will constitute a grave offense causing great concern to the Great and Dear Leaders. Remember this! Your failure to mercilessly treat prisoners may result in your own parents being detained here. You may kill any of them anywhere and at any time if they don’t obey your orders. Remember this! They are worse than beasts so treat them accordingly. If they look up straight at your eyes when you are giving them orders, if they don’t stop work to pay you respect when you pass by, if they don’t run to you when you call them, you can punish them in any way you wish. Remember you are their “Sir” or “Lord” and, under no circumstances, allow them to disobey you!”

“Comrades! You must always remain faithful to your duty as a guard and enforce thorough and strict watch on them so that not a single political prisoner can ever escape from the detention settlement. You may not be fully

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aware now, but you will soon realize who are the political prisoners here.”

“The s.o.b.s here are the pro-American or Japanese elements, South Korean collaborators, those who betrayed the fatherland and the impure elements attempting to crush our state. In the past, they all sucked the blood of your grandparents, your parents and massacred innocent people! They are our enemy and devils who betrayed our Great leader and Dear leader and are bent on overthrowing the system of our Republic.”

Chapter II

Living Conditions in Detention Settlements

Life in the detention settlements for the prisoners consists of squalid living conditions, insufficient diet, hard labor, murderous treatment, and a total forfeiture of individual rights. In general, prisoners live in poorly built sheds, typically made of clay and covered with thatched roofs. The bachelors' quarters are often overcrowded and infested with insects, which leads to the prevalence of disease and sickness.

Furthermore, there is no regular supply of daily provisions, such as shoes or clothing. As a result, prisoners must scavenge for pieces of vinyl and cloth to patch up their worn-out clothes. Two witnesses testify that clothes are in such short supply that prisoners compete with each other to strip recently deceased prisoners of their clothing. They use torn tires, straw ropes, animal skin, and anything else suitable to make socks, shoes, and belts. Many prisoners risk their lives to steal a gunny bag for clothing.

Days begin and end with roll call, with hard labor consuming all of the prisoners' time in between. Without exception, the prisoners are held incommunicado, prohibited from writing or receiving letters. In Chapter Five, there is a witness account about a young girl who was killed for attempting to write a letter to her relative.

The two former life detention settlement guards both testify that prison guards are instructed to treat political prisoners mercilessly as beasts and enemies and punish them in any way they wish. Guards are further authorized to kill any prisoners anywhere and any time for any offense without accounting for it. The former female prisoner testifies that she was told by a prison official on her arrival at the prison, "Remember! You are no longer a human being from now on!" This is why countless atrocities, severe punishments and arbitrary killings routinely take place daily in the detention settlements and political prisons in North Korea. Clearly, it is the system itself that is responsible for the recurrence of crimes against humanity, rather than the individuals concerned.

All witnesses testify that prisoners eat rats, snakes, worms and anything they can lay their hands on in order to survive. It is believed that the North Korean authorities have a policy of controlling prisoners by making them hungry. As a result, apparently all the prisoners are seriously undernourished, overworked, badly beaten and severely punished. The prisoners are exposed to

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all kinds of nutrition deficiency diseases. One common killer disease is pellagra.

All witnesses state that prisoners are short due to undernourishment, disfigured by beatings and in miserable shape. In political prison, prisoners are forced to sit on their knees and keep their heads down when they are called by guards or security officers.

Prisoners' Sheds in Detention Settlement No. 11

Witnessed by DC Choi, former guard of detention settlement

At Detention Settlement No. 11, the prisoners' houses are literally temporary sheds. Many of them are positioned on slopes, a half cave structure, partly covered with a roof of wood and straw. Others were built of earthen bricks with the same type of roof. They are always very low. Therefore, sheds are hardly recognizable at a distance or from above.



Prisoners' Sheds in the Detention Settlement

Witnessed by MC Ahn, former guard of detention settlements



In August 1987, we arrived at Life Detention Settlement No. 13 as newly recruited guards. When we saw the prisoners' villages for the first time, all of us were very surprised and said to each other, "Hey, look, they must be the South Korean beggar villages that we used to watch on North Korean TV! They are worse than cow barns or pig sties, aren't they?" One of us asked the commanding officer, Lt. Shim, "What are those sheds for?" Lt. Shim replied, "They are for political prisoners. Don't you see that the sheds are still too good for them? They should be grateful for the fact that they are still alive and that they are given a shelter. Aren't we generous?"

The shelters were made of clay walls with a thatched roof and needed additional support from logs to prevent them from collapsing. The sheds were so miserable that it was difficult to distinguish the entrance from the windows. They were just like animal pens.

The prisoners' sheds are called "harmonicas" because of their tiny rooms - one for each family - which resemble the cells in a harmonica. There is a small window on the chimney side. Each compartment is 3 x 4 meters wide including a separate space for cooking.

The Typical Appearance of Prisoners

Witnessed by Mr. DC Choi, a former detention settlement guard

The prisoners are treated as enemies by the security officers and guards in the detention settlements. Children are taught to read, write, add and subtract in school for three years. Then they are sent to work. Due to chronic undernourishment and hard work, most children stop growing and end up short in adulthood.

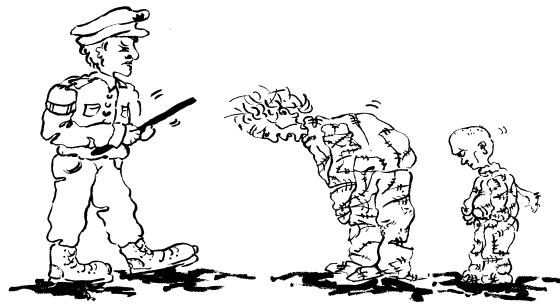
Shortly after my arrival at Detention Settlement No. 11 in 1986, we received orders to cut down some trees in front of a training hall. A few prisoners, better off than most others in terms of clothing and health, were brought in to do the job. The prisoners were very dirty and about 140 ~ 150 cm tall. A bald man called me, "Sir!" I asked him how old he was. I was so surprised to hear him reply, "Sir, I am 55 years old."



The Physical Appearance of Typical Prisoners

Witnessed by Mr. Hyok Ahn, former detention settlement prisoner

When I first arrived at the detention settlement in November 1987, as a young boy of 18, I was shocked to see prisoners in such miserable shape. Most of them were so poorly dressed, their clothes all patched-up. They covered their whole face with dirty rags revealing only their twinkling eyes. They were so short, like children compared to the settlement officers. Through dirty and worn-out pieces of cloth, I could see their dirty faces, all skin and bone. None of them walked normally. Many of them walked with their knees bent and their backs crouched over. When they saw me, they gave me sympathetic eyes and said, "Look! That poor boy is now a dead man!"



They were not walking, they simply moved forward by shaking their bodies. They put on all kinds of dirty pieces of rags to keep them warm even during the summer. They carry a spoon around their neck and an empty can by their side. Some of them had their arms or legs broken as a result of severe beatings by security officers. Child prisoners almost always have big stomachs and bulging eyes, a very strange sight. Beating prisoners for nothing is a standard practice here. When the prisoners work collectively, they look more like animals rather than people.

Nevertheless, they were forced to meet their daily work quotas as long as they were alive, whether sick, crippled or disabled. They had to work from five o'clock in the morning until 8 o'clock in the evening. Failure to meet the quota or minor violations of rules could lead to reduction or discontinuation of food ration. Therefore, as long as they could breathe, they had to work for survival. Wherever the prisoners were, you could always hear the angry voices of security officers and the screaming of prisoners.

Typical Appearance of Prisoners

Witnessed by Mr. MC Ahn, former guard of detention settlements



Female prisoners in their forties usually have bent-over backs



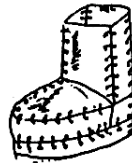
Children under the age of 15 usually have big heads and swollen bellies



A male prisoner



← pig's hide
← rice straw twine



↑
A shoe made of rubber belting or the sides of old tires stitched with fine wire

Heavy wire →



Discarded tire tube

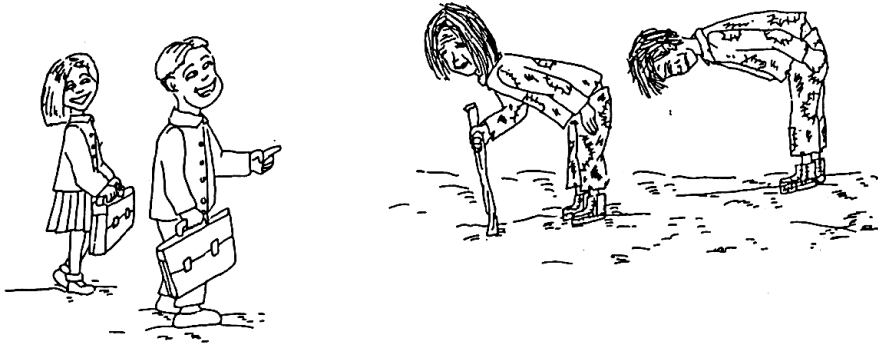
The political prisoners looked as if they were wearing rags with the patch-ups indistinguishable from the original clothes. Also, their hair was all curled up, not having been combed for a long time. They were so weak that they had to lean against the tools they were working with. They looked like Africans with dark complexion, all bones and skin, men, women and children alike.

We guards could not believe what we saw for the first time and remained speechless for a little while. Then, we began to whisper to each other, "Are you sure they are human?"

Political prisoners detained from a young age are dwarfed, their growth retarded by malnutrition and hard labor. The average height of political prisoners in all the settlements is perhaps 145 ~ 150 cm, an indication that many of them arrived at a young age.

Prisoners Forced to Bow to Security Officers' Children

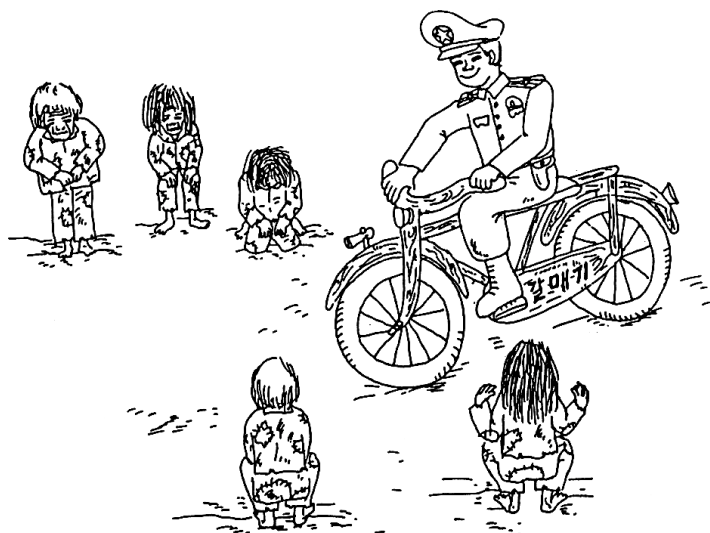
Witnessed by MC Ahn, former guard of detention settlements



Political prisoners of all ages are forced to greet the children of security officers who are over 5 years old with a 90-degree deep bow and call them “Master Child of Masters.” This behavior is highly irregular and humiliating in the Korean tradition.

Prisoners Must Salute Security Officers

Witnessed by MC Ahn, former guard at detention settlements



Political prisoners must always stop their work and bow deeply or kneel at the arrival of security officers or guards. Failure to do so would invite severe beatings and detention in the jail.

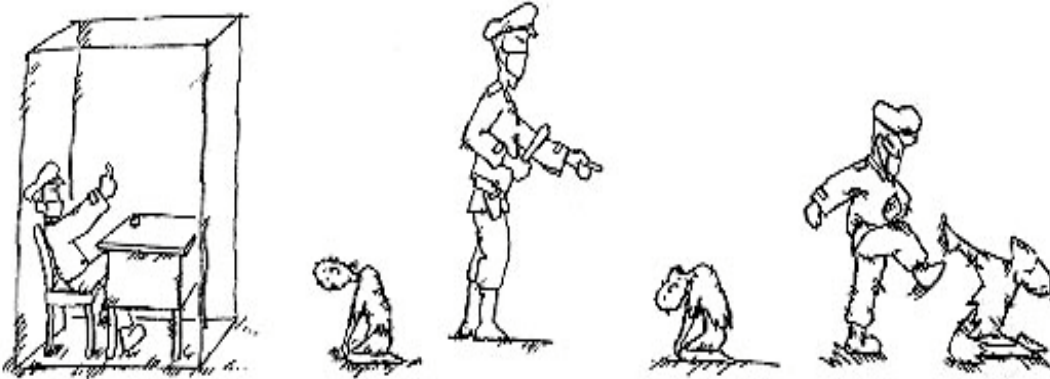
The *Kalmaegi* brand is the best quality bicycle in North Korea and a popular gift item from the Great leader or Dear leader. The bicycle is produced by prisoners in Life Detention Settlement No. 25, Chongjin city of North Hamkyong Province.

The bicycle is a status symbol and settlement officers ride these bicycles smugly.

Prisoners and Prison Guards

Witnessed by Ms. SO Lee, former political prisoner

At all the factories, there are glass boxes for prison guards to sit in

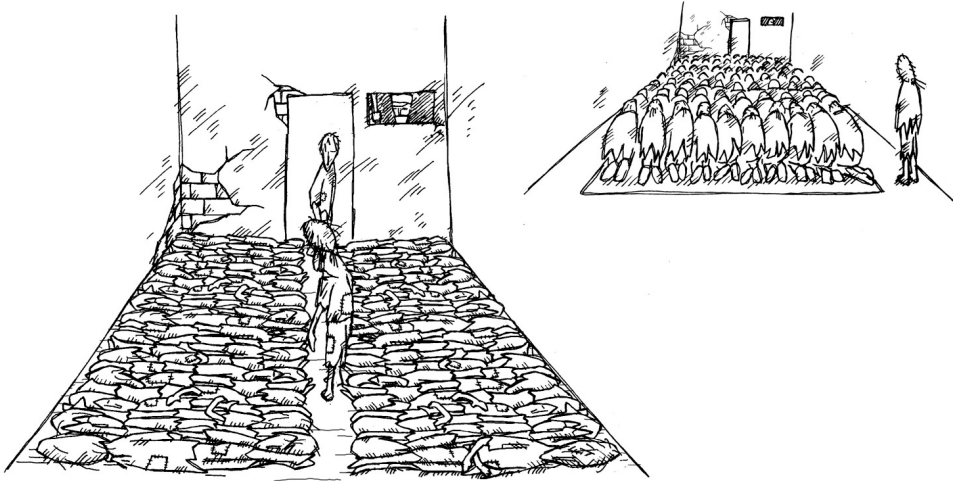


while supervising prisoners at work. The glass walls enable them to watch the prisoners at work while avoiding their terrible stench. In addition, the prison guards always wear masks and keep some distance from the prisoners because of the bad smell.

As standard practice, a prisoner must run to the official and sit down on her knees with her head down whenever she is called. The prisoner can only answer the questions asked and cannot say anything else. Prisoners are very often kicked in the face or breast for slow answers or movement. The prisoners are severely punished for raising their heads or stretching their bodies.

Prisoners' Sleeping Conditions

Witnessed by Ms. SO Lee, former prisoner of a political prison



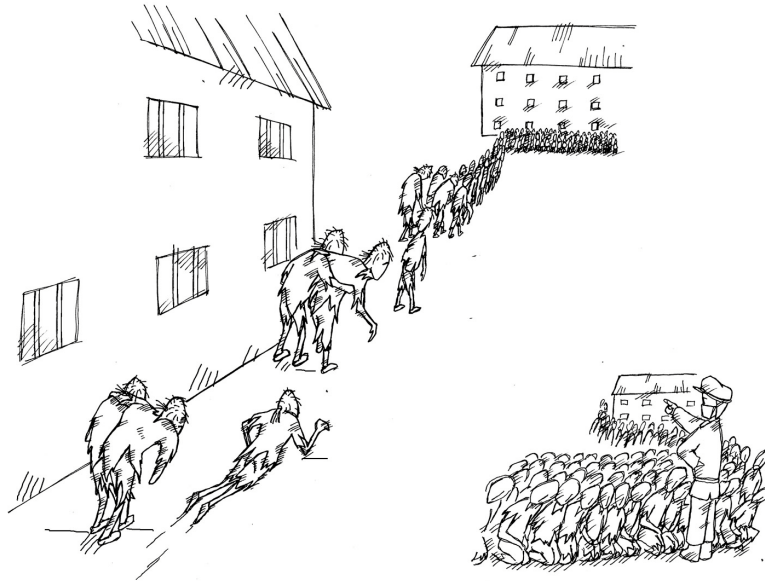
Some eighty to ninety prisoners sleep in a flea-infested chamber about six meters long by five meters wide (about 19 feet by 16 feet). Some eighty percent of the prisoners are housewives. The prison chamber is so congested that sleeping there is itself a torture. Prisoners sleep on the floor, squeezed together, head and feet alternating. So, prisoners sleep with the stinking feet of other prisoners right under their nose. They roll up their clothes for pillows.

During the winter, prisoners share body heat against the cold wind coming under the floor. However, during the summer, it is so stuffy with the sweat and stink of the prisoners that they prefer sleeping at the work site even though it means more work.

Two prisoners must stand on night duty for one-hour shifts. The following morning, prisoners on night duty must report to the prison authorities all the details of their duty including the sleep talking of other prisoners. They get their duty hour extended if caught sleeping.

Evening Roll Call

Witnessed by SO Lee, former female prisoner of a political prison



The prisoners are divided into units and teams and must always act collectively by group under the slogan, “All Actions by Unit and Team!” Prisoners get up, line up for roll call, proceed to work, take meals, go to the toilet, finish work and go to bed collectively and at the mercy of the prison authorities.

At the end of the day’s grueling work, the prisoners are so tired and exhausted that many of them experience physical problems returning to the prison chamber promptly. This means that the other prisoners in the same unit have to wait and sleep less. Every night, it is a hellish experience that lasts for an hour or even longer: the calling of prisoners for others, or repeated roll calls, and prisoners desperate to go to sleep as soon as possible.

The Kaecheon Women’s Prison comprises the following eleven work units: miscellaneous factory, export factory, shoe-making factory, leather/rubber factory, clothing factory, fabric-cutting factory, work preparation unit, maintenance unit, drop-out punishment unit, farm unit and kitchen unit.

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The prisoners must always keep their heads down at work and avoid other movement unnecessary for work. More than half of the female prisoners have lumps on their head or shoulders and are hunchbacks or crippled. Most female prisoners working in the shoe factory are baldheaded.

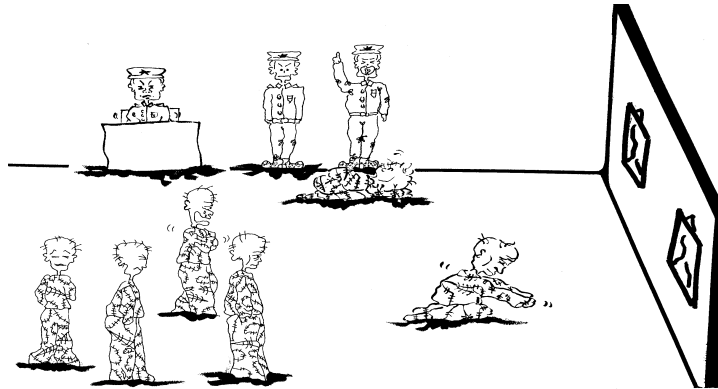
The entire unit is responsible for the mistakes of any one prisoner in the team. As a result, newcomers are not welcome because the entire unit will have to work more and go to bed later because of the newcomer's failure to move and work fast enough.

Prisoners Forced to Pay Respect to Leaders on New Year's Day

Witnessed by H. Ahn, former detention settlement prisoner

Every New Year's Eve, there would be an announcement that beginning from midnight, an honorable opportunity would be available for all prisoners to give a formal bow of respect to "Great Leader" and "Dear Leader."

For prisoners who were always so exhausted from overwork, hunger, and disease, this was a very tiring practice. But because of the fear of punishment, they would get up during the middle of the night and go to the propaganda office to offer New Year's bows to the leaders.



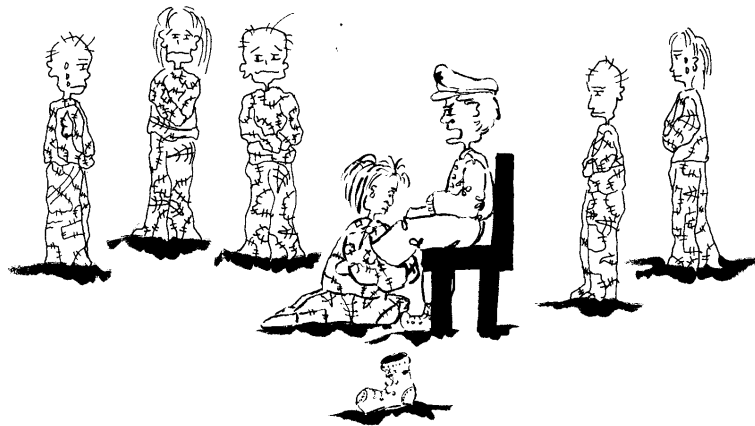
The prisoners all look so tired and miserable, waiting in long lines throughout the cold winter night for their turn to bow. When they reach the hall, they bow before the pictures of the leaders and an officer takes their names.

They all know that they must come to the same place the next morning to listen to, copy and memorize the leaders' New Year message. The security officer would threaten the prisoners, "Any of you who fail to memorize the leaders' message by heart will be sent to hard labor. You got it? If anyone makes a single mistake or skips a single word, I will crush their heads. Those who have bad brains are not eligible to be citizens of the great fatherland, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea! You got it?"

Female Prisoners in Detention Settlement

Witnessed by Mr. Hyok. Ahn, former detention settlement prisoner

Girls in the settlement, whether they are single or from a family, normally become the sexual toys of security officers. Their complexion is less rough than other prisoners. They often spend hours in the security office in the evenings and, in return, get some food or easy work the next day. The girls want to get special favors from senior officers. If a security officer complains that his legs feel cold, female prisoners often volunteer to hold his legs to their bosom in an effort to get a special favor.



The young female prisoners are often sexually aggressive. The male prisoners who accept to be their sexual partners risk severe punishment but get better meals or additional food from the girls because they work in kitchen and food warehouses. Once, I asked a fellow prisoner, “What if she becomes pregnant and her pregnancy is discovered months later?” He instantly replied, “I am worried about right now. Why should I worry about what happens months later?”

Prisoners Steal the Leftover Possessions of Dead Prisoners

Witnessed by H. Ahn, former prisoner of detention settlement

The bachelor prisoners must survive for an indefinite period with the clothes they wear on the day of arrival at the detention settlement. We received a pair of sneakers every 18 months and a pair of winter shoes every five years despite the heavy labor. There is no supply of underwear. It is extremely difficult to find ways to cover the body and protect it from the cold during the winter.



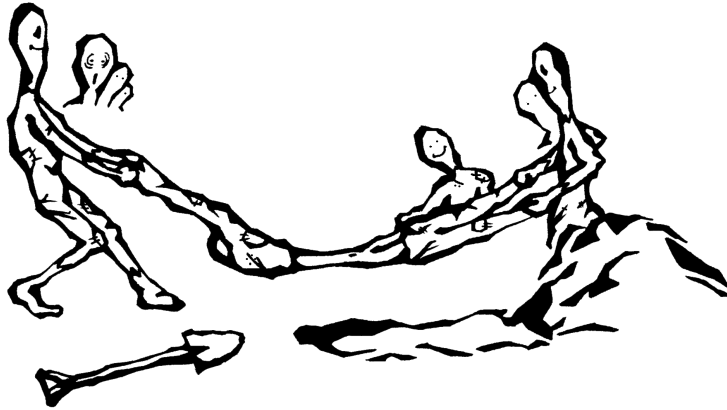
The news of the death of a prisoner always attracts many prisoners from all over. They come to strip the dead person for additional pieces of clothes and often compete for provisions left by the dead person. Therefore, almost always, corpses are buried naked.

On rainy days, prisoners had to dry their clothes with their body heat because they don't have spare clothes. During the winter, they have to pick up whatever is available to cover their already heavily patched-up clothes. Proper shoes are another rare item. Makeshift shoes from straw mats and other types of cloth are considered to be the best if rat's hide is used for the bottom of the shoes.

This is why there is no rubbish, no waste food and no incinerators in the detention settlement.

Stealing from Dead Prisoners

Witnessed by CH Kang, former child prisoner of detention settlement



The lack of clothing was such a serious problem in the detention settlement!

Every prisoner tried hard to find anything for clothing. Once when a prisoner froze to death in his shed because of the lack of fire wood and poor nutrition, I heard the quick sound of frantic footsteps. When I followed one of them and arrived at the doorstep of the victim, there were already several prisoners there who were about to carry away the corpse on a stretcher. I saw a couple of prisoners rushing into the dead man's shed to steal anything that was left.

When they dug up the frozen ground and were ready to bury him, the corpse was immediately stripped by the prisoners. They buried a naked man! I could not watch any more. I was confused and about to faint. I ran home.

Then, I remembered the security officer who gave each of us a piece of blanket when we first arrived here and said, "You will not receive another blanket supply while you are here. You better watch your blanket carefully." Somebody stole a blanket from us the next day. A piece of blanket is one of the most important winter provisions. All my clothes were worn out and had holes here and there. It was very difficult to survive winter with these worn-out clothes.

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Therefore, a gunny bag was considered a fortune. Everybody tried very hard to steal one. However, if a prisoner was caught stealing gunny bags, he was severely beaten. The beating was such that the victim hardly survived many days. My grandmother often told us, “My children, never and never, never try to steal a gunny bag.” If you find a bag, you cut it into many small pieces to patch-up worn-out clothes and also to conceal that it was a stolen gunny bag.

Chapter III

Working Conditions

Ms. Sun-ok Lee, the former female prisoner, alleges that she frequently heard the prison officials mention that the production from the detention settlements and political prisons accounts for 40% of the total North Korean GDP. Although the accuracy of this statement is challenged, the statement illustrates how hard prisoners are forced to work and that one of the purposes of the detention settlements and political prisons is labor exploitation.

The prisoners are pushed to work so hard that many die during the process. No prisoners, even if sick or crippled, receive their full ration unless they meet their daily work quotas. Ms. Lee claims that more than half of the female prisoners in Kaechon political prison have lumps on their heads or shoulders, are hunchbacks, or are crippled as a result of repeating the same motion for an extended period of time under the conditions of poor ventilation, light, and diet.

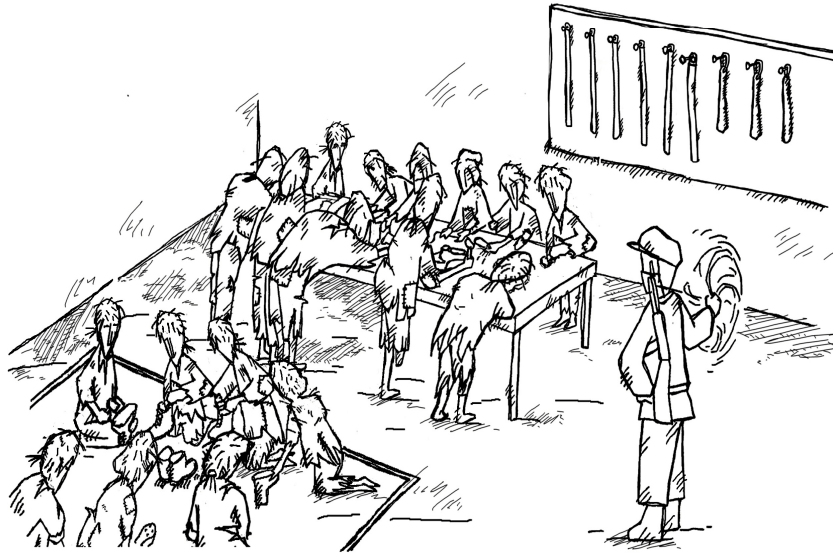
Oftentimes, the work is not only physically difficult or menial, but also hazardous to the prisoners health and safety. The witness accounts describe some of the tasks that the prisoners were forced to carry out, including working in collapsing mines, carrying dung, operating human motors, and extinguishing fires.

Due to the nature of these tasks, many prisoners die during work. However, they are immediately replaced by fresh prisoners to meet the production target. Ms. Lee recalls that North Korean authorities were never worried about the supply of new prisoners.

One of the former guards discloses the widespread practice among the security officers of embezzling the state property produced by prisoners. According to him, security officers compete with each other to get a posting at one of the detention settlements and then make prisoners work hard to produce excess for their own pockets. This is no surprise and highly probable under any totalitarian system.

Typical Scene of Prisoners at Work

Witnessed by Ms. Sun-ok Lee, former prisoner of a political prison



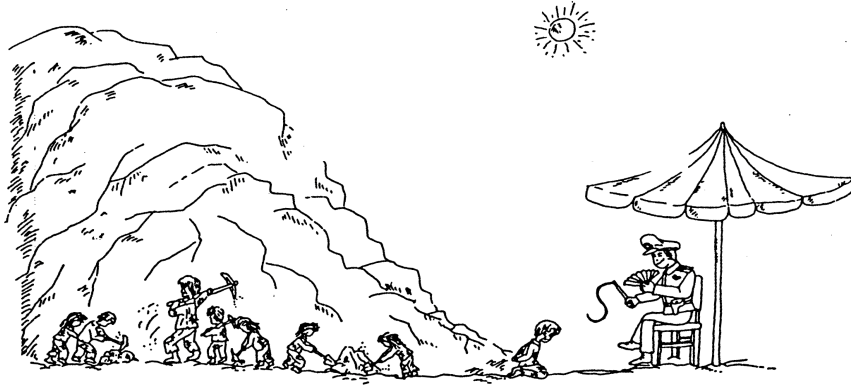
Officially, the purpose of the prison is to reform the ideology of the prisoners. In reality, however, the purpose of the prison is to exploit slave labor. The prisoners work 16~18 hours every day without wages. Cow leather whips are always ready on the walls and women are whipped, kicked, or punched daily for no reason. The prisoners are not allowed to talk, laugh or take a rest. In addition, the prisoners must always keep their heads down and only repeat the same motion for work. As a result, more than half of the women have lumps on their heads or shoulders, are hunchbacks, or are crippled. The camp officers and guards always wear masks because they cannot tolerate the prisoners' stench! The prisoners often urinate or defecate while working because they cannot wait.

The prisoners are allowed to take showers only twice a year. Therefore, all the prisoners naturally stink. The entire prison is full of the awful smell of sweat and the stench of the prisoners enters your lungs the moment you are inside the prison.

The prison officials and guards are there by life appointment. North Korean authorities never transfer them to other posts for fear that accounts of their crimes may leak to the outside world.

Hard Labor at Life Imprisonment Settlements

Witnessed by Mr. M.C Ahn, former guard of detention settlements



A typical scene of political prisoners doing hard labor. There are quarries at most settlements. Brutal beatings are common and prisoners often drop dead while working.

Many political prisoners are recruited for the “grand construction” of special projects such as a secret nuclear plant, tunnels, or a human biology laboratory under the control of the 3rd bureau. The prisoners are recruited under the false promise that they will be released if they work hard for the “grand construction.”

However, no one has survived the grand construction and returned to his family, dead or alive.

Have You Heard About the Human Motor?

Witnessed by Ms. Sun-ok Lee, former prisoner of a political prison



The power supply in North Korea was erratic and almost every other day prisoners worked without electricity during the daytime. However, the prison rule was that the daily quota had to be met whether there was electric power or not. So, female prisoners were whipped to keep the motor running manually for the power sewing machines.

There were about 100 sewing machines in the sewing factory, operated by one electric motor. The women were forced, ten in each team, to pull the belt on their shoulders and operate 100 sewing machines for one hour each. Then, another team would take over. The hardship of the prisoners was beyond description. The production officers mercilessly whipped the prisoners to maintain their productivity.

Female prisoners have to meet their work quota to get the standard meal of 100 grams. Each shoe manufactured requires a countless number of small nails to be hammered and so each prisoner has to hammer so many nails every day.

Their fingers are all bent and deformed with hard skin. Three hundred prisoners produce 1,000 pairs of boots daily, working 16~18 hours to meet the work quota. Often they are forced to work until morning to meet the quota,

under collective punishment for the failure of other prisoners to meet the quota.

Myong-suk Kim was a very competent and skillful worker and produced the best quality boots for senior officers. The machines were German, but they were imported in the sixties and started to give problems as they aged. One day, she could not meet the quota due to equipment failure. The guards kicked her and shouted,

“You swine, you better fix your machine quickly.”

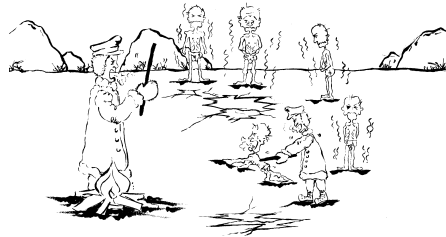
When it became clear one day that she could not meet the quota, she drank hydrochloric acid that was kept there for repairing the machine and killed herself. That was in January, 1992.

The prison authorities conducted ideology classes for all prisoners, everyday, to prevent this “ideological corruption” from recurring. It was very tiring to stop work for one hour everyday and stand listening to a nonsense speech before going to bed an hour late.

Prisoners Forced to Work at a Frozen River during the Winter

Witnessed by Mr. Hyok Ahn, former detention settlement prisoner

The average winter temperature at the settlement was 20~30 degrees below zero in Celsius (4-22 degrees below zero Fahrenheit). In the winter of 1987, shortly after my arrival at the detention settlement, we were forced to lay the foundation for the construction of a power plant scheduled to begin the next spring. Every morning, our task was to break the ice on the river, enter the water, and label the bottom of the river using large stones. There was no equipment. The only tools available were old shovels, picks and poles. Going into a frozen river at dawn during the cold winter felt like death. Nobody dared to be the first.



“You s.o.b.! I am going to kill all of you unless you go into the river,” shouted an angry security officer. We took off our clothes and went into the river with only our pants on. All of us, skin and bone, were shivering from the utter cold. We worked seven hours in the water everyday.

In the beginning, our limbs felt numb from the freezing cold. Soon, it became difficult to bend our arms and knees – they had become as stiff as logs. Some of us began to fall into the water like the stiff logs that we had become. I felt the blood stop running in my legs and soon they didn’t feel like legs at all. Some prisoners stood immobile in the water and cried, “Please kill me!”

At the end of the day, our fingers and toes were swollen and looked red as if they were burnt. The pain was so severe that it was difficult to go to bed at night. After months of working in the river, our fingers and toes eventually turned black and began to rot.

The Yodok detention settlement is situated at the foot of a high mountain and winter begins early. Water begins to freeze in mid September. The condition of severe undernourishment made the prisoners feel even colder. The average winter temperate is about 20 to 30 degrees below zero in Celsius (4-22 degrees below zero Fahrenheit). Hills and fields around are all covered with snow and the freezing cold wind made the poorly dressed prisoners feel extremely cold. No prisoners were free from frostbite. None of us had proper shoes, socks or hand gloves. The swollen hands and legs look red and give us such pain in the night that it was very difficult to sleep. No medical treatment was available. The best prisoners can expect was to soak hands and legs in a pan with cold water. The number of surviving fingers and toes from frostbite was an indication of telling how long a prisoner had been in the detention settlement.

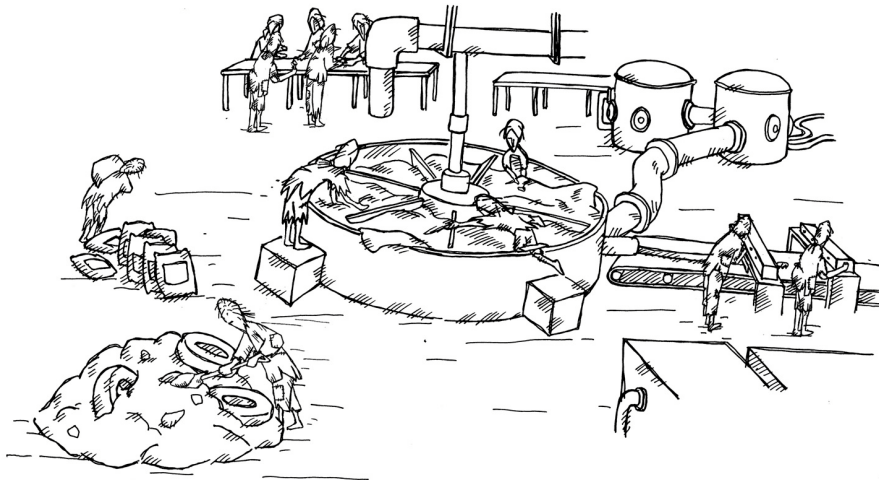
One day in the winter of 1987, the security officers announced construction of a power plant in my first winter in the settlement. "All of you must feel honored with and proud of this opportunity to contribute to the welfare of the state by constructing a power plant!"

We whispered, "How many of us are going to be killed this time? How many of us would have saved fingers and toes from frost-bite when the plant has been completed?"

This was how the winter work in the frozen river began. If any prisoner stop moving in the river, the security officers shouted, "You s.o.b! You come here." And they began to brutally beat the prisoners or push his head into water short of suffocation. We worked like this for seven hours everyday. Prisoners looked as though they would die soon from freezing and brutal beatings. They bled but, strangely, rarely died. If animals were that brutally beaten, they must have all died. However, many prisoners survived heavy labor work under the conditions of hunger, freezing and beatings. I believe that human beings were born with a very strong and miraculous life force.

Female Prisoners at a Rubber Factory

Witnessed by Ms. Sun-ok Lee, former prisoner of a political prison

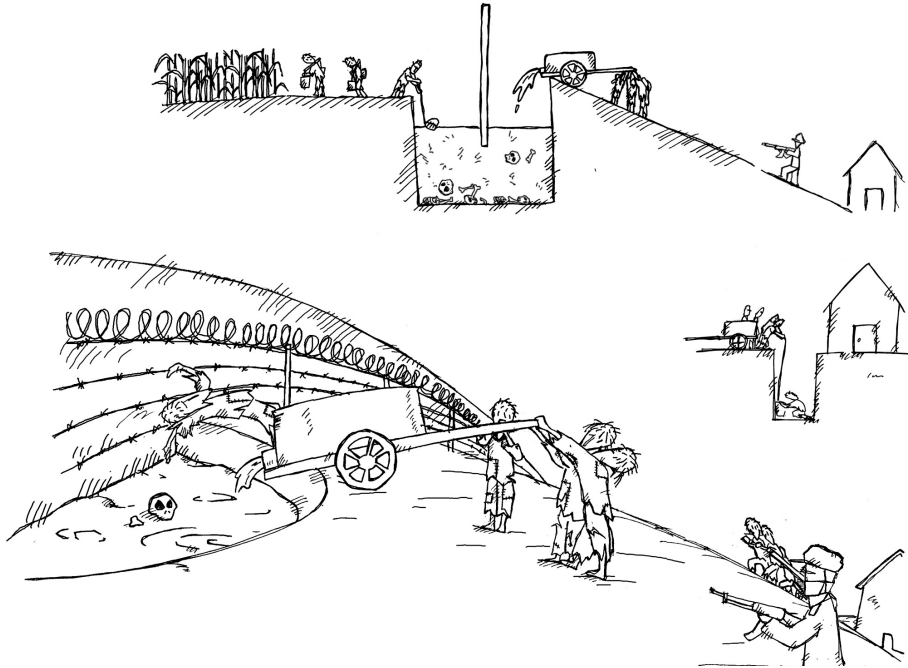


The prison rubber factory was one of the most dangerous and difficult places for women to work. They had to mix used rubber scraps with granular rubber, carry the resulting rubber substance, mix it with rubber glue that came from a big tank which produced poisonous fumes, and knead it in a big round tank. I remember one female prisoner whose head got covered by the rubber glue while she was cleaning the tall rubber glue tank. She suffocated.

Because air creates foam in the rubber, the whole factory is tightly sealed all year round. In addition, the factory is always full of hot steam for molding shoe soles. Therefore, it's always stuffy and suffocating! The sticky mixture in the tank often overflows and women must push it back into the tank. This was very difficult work for hungry and weak women, and so the sticky mixtures often dragged women into the tank and killed them. So many female prisoners were killed and injured that the prison authorities finally ordered the factory to be operated only by male prisoners in 1989, two years after my arrival at the prison.

Women Prisoners Carrying Dung

Witnessed by Ms. Sun-ok Lee, former prisoner of a political prison



Prisoners who are old, slow at work or caught looking at their reflections in a window glass are sent to the “drop-out team” for 3 months, 6 months or a year for punishment. Their main job is to collect dung from the prison toilet tanks and dump it into a large dung pool everyday for supply to the farming teams working at the prison farm outside the wall. Teams of five prisoners must pull a metal tank weighing 800 kilograms.

Two women wade knee-deep at the bottom of the toilet and fill a 20-liter rubber bucket with dung using their bare hands. Three other women pull up the rubber bucket from above and then pour the contents into a transport tank.

Sometimes, the prisoners pulling up the bucket are so weak, they fall into the toilet tank because of the weight of the bucket. When the heavy tank is full, they haul it up to a very large and deep dung pool on the hill.

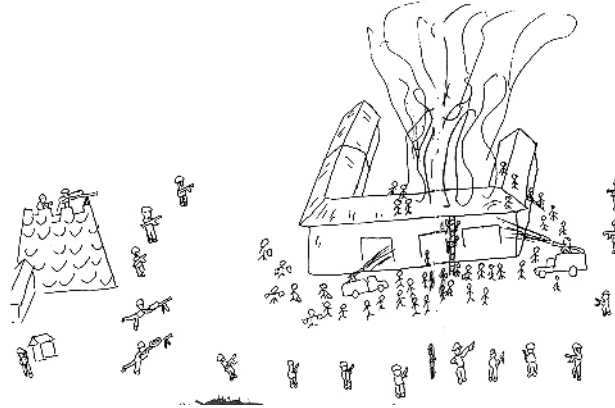
One rainy day in 1991, a housewife from Pyongyang name Ok-tan Lee had been carrying dung all day long and was ready to transfer the dung to the

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huge pool. However, the lid of the tank on the wheel somehow got stuck and would not open. When she climbed on the tank to push the door open, she slipped from the rain-wet surface and plunged into the ground dung pool. It was so deep that she disappeared into the dung. A guard some distance away (they always keep their distance because of the stink from the prisoners) shouted, “Stop it! Let her die there unless you want to die the same way yourself!” She was left to drown there in the dung.

Prisoners Forced into Fire

Witnessed by Mr. MC Ahn , former guard of detention settlements



In the autumn of 1989, there was a fire at the warehouse of the guard units in Settlement No. 13. When we arrived at the site, the warehouse was already aflame. While the guards were trying to put out the fire with water buckets, security officers brought some 200 prisoners. Then, we were ordered to stop putting out the fire and arm ourselves, instead. Some prisoners were forced to extinguish the fire while armed guards watched. The prisoners went up to the roof of the gasoline store and began to remove the roof. Others were forced to go into the fire and bring out the cargo from inside. The security officer's orders always had to be obeyed under any circumstances. So, some prisoners bravely went inside the burning warehouse and began to take cargo outside. In fact, the prisoners went into the fire because refusing to do so would have meant being killed by the security officers. The prisoners were very lucky that day because none of them burnt to death.

Afterwards, the officers searched the bodies of the prisoners and punished four prisoners found with rolls of gauze and socks. One of the prisoners died during the punishment.

Another incident: I was undergoing guard training at Settlement No. 11 in mid-July, 1987 when there was a fire in the mountain. When we arrived at the site, some 2,000 beggars (political prisoners) were jumping into the flames to put it out. We did not join the fire fighting. The prisoners were jumping around in the flames on orders from the security officers, and we just watched them for fun. That was the first time we had seen political prisoners. They

looked like black Africans with dark complexions, all skin and bone, moving like machines. The fire, which began at around 10 o'clock in the morning, was brought under control at around 5 o'clock in the afternoon.

At around 2 o'clock in the afternoon, the prisoners began to fall from exhaustion because they were weak and hungry from not having lunch. Many of them caught on fire but still kept moving into the fire. One prisoner had flames on his back and shouted like a beast while rolling around to put out the fire. The security officers just watched and didn't help. Later, they discovered five prisoners dead and two prisoners missing during the fire. We were on the other side of the mountain searching for the two missing prisoners when we were ordered to return. They found the two missing prisoners in the ashes.

The prisoners were ordered to descend the mountain with the seven corpses. They just looked indifferent with no sadness or mourning over the deaths of their fellow prisoners. One of my comrades whispered to me on the way back to the barracks, "I have never seen anybody scorched to death before!"

So Much Punishment and Loss of Life to Meet Export Deadline

Witnessed by Ms. Sun-ok Lee, former prisoner of a political prison

• Routine Export Items



• Special Export Items



To meet the deadlines for export, the prisoners often worked until one o'clock in the morning or, for many months, the prisoners slept two to four hours at the work site. They ate, worked and slept in the same place. The standard export items all year around were clothing and different kinds of brushes. They were for markets in Europe, Japan and Hong Kong.

On an ad hoc basis, prisoners produced rose decorations of various colors, each prisoner producing 60 pieces an hour or 1,000 pieces a day, for export to France (September 1990 to February, 1991). They produced some 900,000 brassieres for export to Russia for \$2 a piece (May to November 1988), and countless sweaters for Japan (February to August, 1991).

There were big water pans for the prisoners to wash their hands clean frequently. Each prisoner was given a piece of white cloth to cover their dirty laps and keep the products clean. The finished products were beautifully packed and shipped for export.

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Prisoners often fall asleep while working and wake up when their fingers are injured by the sewing machine. They apply sewing machine oil on the wound and continue to work. They have to hide their bleeding fingers for fear of punishment for sleeping. So much punishment and loss of life for the sake of meeting the export deadline! I was informed that the foreign exchange earned was spent to supply imported television sets and refrigerators for the security and police officers.

Prisoners Forced Into Fire and Burned to Death

Witnessed by Mr. DC Choi, former detention settlement guard



In May 1986, there was a big fire in the mountains of Detention Settlement No. 11. The fire lasted for three days.

Prisoners were mobilized to fight the fire and forced to make paths to prevent the fire from spreading. They hesitated but were so badly beaten that they had no other choice but to work dangerously close to the flames. Consequently, some 40 prisoners were burnt to death.

None of the security officers felt sorry or showed any signs of a guilty conscience at the sight of the burnt corpses. They laughed, "Look! They look like roasted pork, don't they?" At that time, I seriously wondered deep in my heart whether those officers were human beings or not.

Dead Prisoners Buried under Fruit Trees

Witnessed by Ms. SO Lee, former prisoner of a political prison



Many prisoners died from hard work, poor treatment, and beatings. The dead bodies were often buried under the fruit trees in the prison orchard. The fruits (apples, pears, peaches, and plums) from the Kaechon orchard have earned a reputation for their large size and sweet taste. They are reserved for senior party and police officials.

On one occasion, 150 corpses were rolled up in straw mats and buried under the fruit trees. The families were never informed and identification is no longer possible, once buried.

I remember some of the victims who disappeared under the trees: Kwang-ok Cho, a 62 year old housewife from Shinuiju city, who was arrested for trying to get a blanket in the black market for her daughter's wedding gift; In-suk Kim, a middle-aged housewife, whose husband died in a mine accident, who often cried out in her dreams the names of her three children left home;

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Dok-sun Kim, a middle aged housewife from Chongjin city who was terribly worried about her old parents; Sa-won Kim, a housewife from Kosong-kun, whose handicapped husband badly needed her; Jong-shim Lee, a 19 year-old girl, and other young girls. Once, a group of dead prisoners were buried collectively at a location near the chestnut forest outside the prison.

Chapter IV

Food and Health Conditions

It is commonly believed that North Koreans learned from the former USSR that the best tool for controlling prisoners is hunger. Ali Lameda, a Venezuelan poet who was imprisoned in North Korea for five years, confessed that hunger was much more painful than being beaten. The prisoners suffer from such starvation that they will do anything for a little more food. Therefore, the most feared punishment is a reduced food ration.

Because the daily food ration is inadequate, both in terms of quantity and nutrition, prisoners in North Korea often resort to other means to satisfy their hunger and diet. Personal accounts reveal that these various methods included, among other things, catching and eating rats, snakes, frogs, and worms, stealing and eating pig slop, and eating soft clay, grass, and roots. However, if the prisoners are caught eating anything other than their daily rations, they are invariably punished.

Accordingly, the lack of sufficient diet and nutrients often leads to both immediate and chronic health problems. One of the most frequent problems resulting from the rampant malnutrition is pellagra, a disease caused by the lack of a type of B vitamin which produces great tiredness and disorders of the skin. In general, most prisoners have stunted growth and physical ailments.

The health of prisoners is also seriously diminished by poor sanitary conditions. Prisoners in the political prisons are allowed to take showers very briefly only twice a year. In addition, they are constantly harassed by lice, fleas, and other insects. Prisoners must use communal toilets only twice a day at fixed times and so, consequently, they often urinate or defecate while working.

The gravity of the health and sanitary conditions is compounded because of the lack of adequate medical facilities. Two witnesses testify that prisoners who become very sick are separated, quarantined, and left to die without medical care. Three other witnesses from the detention settlements testify that they have seen prisoners brutally used for medical training purposes by fresh doctors from medical schools who have been assigned to the settlements for the medical treatment of security officers, guards, and their families.

Patients Left to Die under Quarantine

Witnessed by Ms. Sun-ok Lee, former prisoner of a political prison



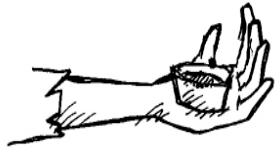
I was sequestered in a patient room and left there to die twice, in 1989 and 1992. Paratyphoid spread among the prisoners in May 1989. Many prisoners complained of pain in the abdomen and high fever before fainting. The prison doctor ordered them quarantined in a small room. Some fifty patients were put into a tiny room, so small that patients were placed on top of one another. Those who were conscious reached out their hands for help; those who were unconscious simply remained underneath and died.

Yong-hi, a 19 year-old girl, was brought to the prison with her mother. She called her mom in a feeble voice for an apple and a little water before she died under the other patients. Her mother was working at the miscellaneous factory and did not know that her daughter perished there.

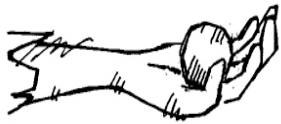
One day, I woke up to hear the voice of Shin-ok Kim, the prisoner/nurse. "How is it that you are still alive? Everybody else died. Get out from there." I was among the few lucky patients who survived the ordeal. When I somehow recovered from the disease, I was sent to report to the medical room. On this occasion, I witnessed the killing of babies in the medical room. [Please refer to Chapter 8, 3] for details about the infanticide.]

Meals for Prisoners

Witnessed by Sun-ok Lee, former prisoner of a political prison



→ Salt soup



→ 100 grams of broken corn,
full meal



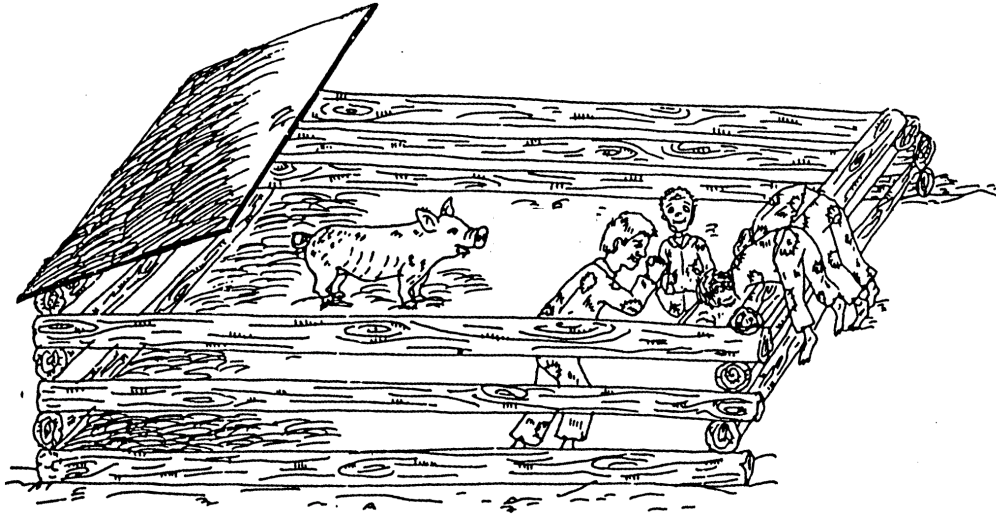
→ 80 grams of broken corn,
reduced for punishment



→ 60 grams of broken corn,
further reduced for
punishment

Prisoners Stealing Pig Slops for Survival

Witnessed by MC Ahn, former guard of detention settlements



I was assigned guard duty to keep watch over the pigpens at Tunnel No. 6, Second Company, Settlement No. 22 from May to November 1991. While I was there, the pigs stopped growing. It took me three months to discover that the political prisoners working in the mines had been eating the pig slop when I was not around or when it got dark. Later, I realized that prisoners at all the detention settlements were always so hungry that they resorted to eating animal feed whenever possible.

When I first discovered that the pigs had stopped growing, I wondered if the slops were not enough. So I brought more waste food from the drainage of the guards' kitchen. Usually, I would go back to my barracks at the end of day and ask the prisoners to boil the waste food from the kitchen and feed it to the pigs. Every morning, I found the kettle and pigsties clean and the prisoners would tell me that they had boiled the waste food, fed the pigs and cleaned the pigsties. I was happy with the clean sties. But I often found the pigs asking for food in the mornings. I wondered for quite some time what was wrong.

One night at around ten o'clock, I decided to find out what really went on in the pigsties at night. I was so surprised to find the prisoners in the cooking section of the pigsties, eating all the chunks of waste food and searching for more food in the liquid. They gave the pigs the liquid after they picked up all the food. The pigs had no food except liquid!

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I returned to my barracks that night and pretended to be unaware the next morning. However, I brought waste food from the kitchen once more during the daytime to feed the pigs and also late in the afternoon for the prisoners as before. It was indeed very sad to watch prisoners so desperate for food.

Prisoners Eat Pig Slops to Avoid Starvation

Experienced by Mr. Hyok Ahn, former detention settlement prisoner

If we were fortunate enough to have no guards around, we would sneak into pigsties to steal pigs' slops. We always carried an empty can with us to scoop out slops from the troughs. Thus, the troughs were cleaned in a matter of seconds. When we were lucky, we drank directly from the troughs. It was a very rare occasion when we felt our stomachs full.



Sometimes, we were discovered by security officers and beaten terribly. On these occasions, we would be beaten until we evacuated more feces than the slops we ate, and then sent to hard labor sites.

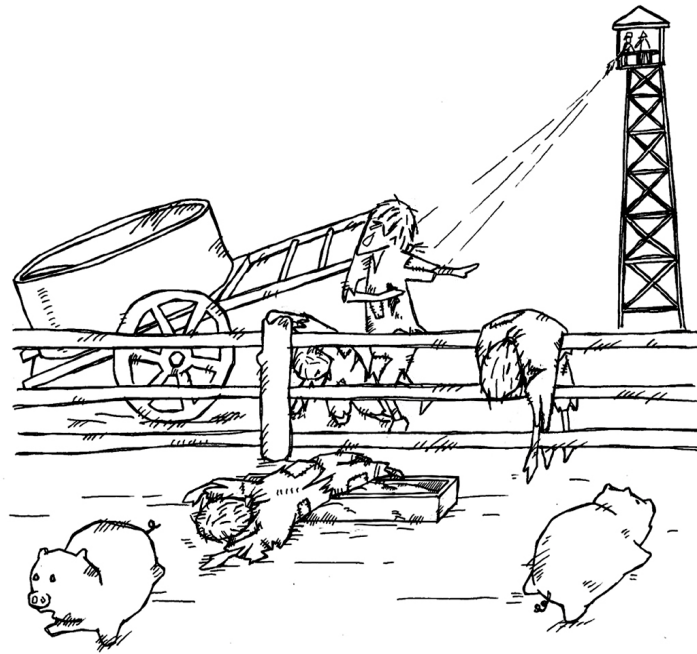
Pigs are raised in the detention settlement for security officers to celebrate the Great Leaders' birthdays. The pigs are raised with rich slops. This was a clear case of animals being fed better than human beings. We were so hungry that we tried to steal slops whenever possible. As a result, the pigs often did not grow to their full size.

Once, we were cautioned by security officers that there was dung mixed in the slops. This did not stop us from stealing slops. When a sow was about to deliver piglets, the security officers made such a fuss and gave it rich slops including rice. What a contrast when they try hard to prevent delivery if a woman prisoner is pregnant.

Once, a calf was born at the cow farms. The prisoners killed, boiled and devoured it. The prisoners were badly beaten and sent to a permanent detention settlement with their families.

Prisoners Killed for Eating Pig Slops

Witnessed by Sun-ok Lee, former prisoner of a political prison



There is no wasted food in the prison kitchen. The kitchen prisoners always give the leftover food from outside to the pigs. So, the pigs are always well-fed and fat for the security officers. The prisoners envy the pigs for the good food and leisure. The dung carrying team is also responsible for cleaning the pigsty. The prisoners carrying dung are always so hungry that many of them risk their lives to steal the pig slops as they pass by. When caught eating the pigs' feed, they are shot and killed.

The prisoners on the dung-carrying team look forward to cleaning the pigsty because they can eat the leftovers from the slops with their hands still filthy with dung. The prisoners on the pig-raising team supply pig slops when the prisoners come to clean the pigsties so that the cleaning prisoners can enjoy the chance to have a "good meal" with the pigs.

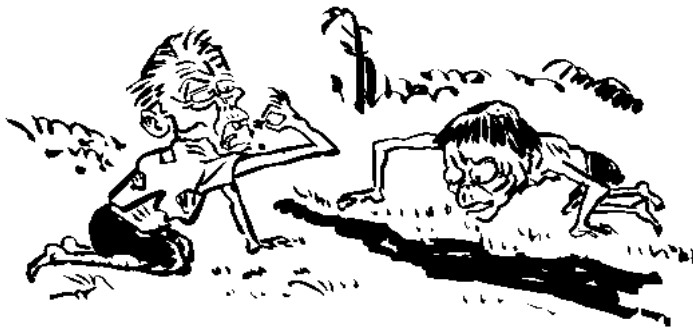
Kum-bok Kim was from Kanggye town, Jagang Province. She was pretty and a very kind-hearted woman. Once, she was caught giving the pigs their feed when other prisoners were cleaning the pens so that prisoners might have a chance to eat pig slops. She was badly beaten by a prison official and kicked until she fainted. She was forced to confess her crime in writing and was sent for further investigation. She died under torture during the investigation.

Prisoners Eat Insects to Prevent Chronic Undernourishment

Witnessed by Mr. DC Choi, former detention settlement guard

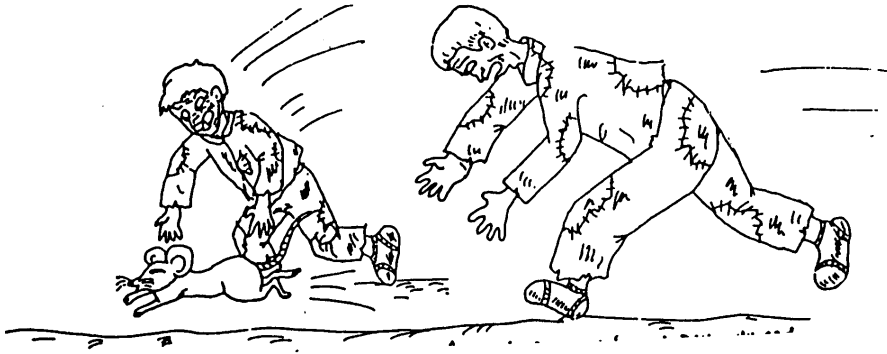
Prisoners in the detention settlements are provided with a bare minimum of food, normally corn, and forced to work at hard labor as slaves. They are always so starved that, when they are not being watched by security officers, they eat grass, rats, snakes, frogs, worms, cockroaches and other insects. Working at livestock farms is considered to be among the best work because they can steal animal feeds and slops. On average, prisoners are considerably shorter than guards because of this undernourishment.

The prisoners sometimes receive old uniforms and underclothes worn out by guards, which are almost always too big for them. This is why many prisoners are found wearing clothes that are larger than they are. The worn-out clothes from 400 ~ 500 guards are shared by some 20,000 prisoners. In fact, they are so miserably clothed, a mix of patches and rags, that gender is hardly recognizable. During winter, they use anything, such as rags and broken pieces of vinyl, to protect their feet. Some prisoners are even found barefoot in winter.



Prisoners Catching Rats for Survival from Hunger

Witnessed by MC Ahn, former guard of detention settlements -



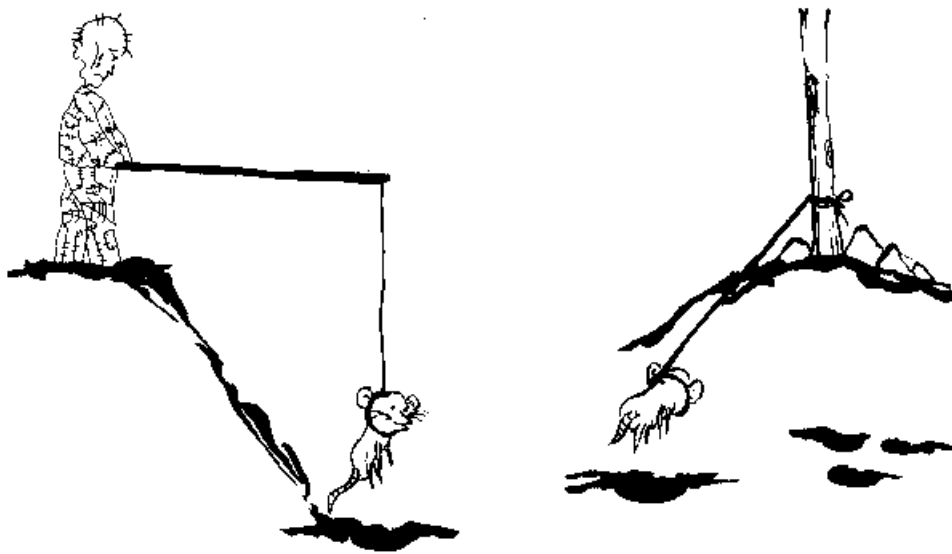
Prisoners are always hungry and there is no protein supply in the food ration. Therefore, they are desperate to catch and eat snakes, frogs or rats, or anything else within their reach. There is a certain species of rat with a dark line on the back. These rats are believed to carry a bleeding fever disease. Prisoners do not eat this species for fear of contracting the fever.

But rats are one of the rare sources of meat in the detention settlements and prisoners hunt them down whenever possible. Rats are often roasted, but some prisoners eat the animal raw, including the meat, head, guts, bones and skin, to avoid detection by security officers. Rats have almost been entirely exterminated and are hard to find in all the settlements.

Prisoners Catching Rats for Survival

Witnessed by Mr. Hyok Ahn, former detention settlement prisoner

Finding food in the detention settlement is an endless battle for survival. We ate whatever we could find - rats, frogs, snakes, insects, grass, beans, or corn grains found in cattle droppings. If we were caught eating anything other than the rationed corn, we were severely punished. Security officers would say, "Remember you are a criminal! The ration should be enough for you!"



However, the severe beatings and punishments did not stop the prisoners from attempting to get additional food. Catching a snake is a real fortune, like butchering a cow. If they find a snake while working, all of them work together to kill it and share it among themselves. When they roast snakes, they have to be extremely careful not to be detected by the security officers. I know a case of death of a prisoner by snakebite while trying to catch it. The great men in the settlement are those who are good at finding food or catching rats, snakes or frogs.

At first, they used a lance or spear to kill the rats. But the blood made other rats run far away. The blood also made it difficult to treat the meat afterwards. As a result, they devised all kinds of hooks to catch rats. Rats

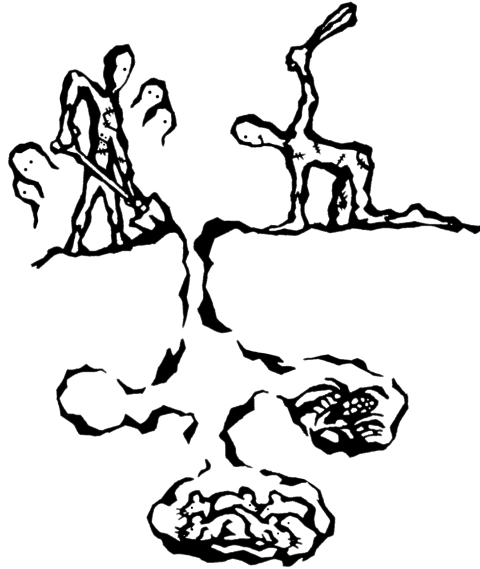
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became extremely difficult to find.

Sometimes, they would find crows flying with a branch of corn. The prisoners would throw stones at the crows and they would drop the corn before flying away. Prisoners pick it up to eat. Often, the prisoners would quarrel among themselves about who hit the crow and who should claim the few pieces of corn dropped by the crows. Those who could not find other food would often break ice in the stream to look for frog eggs.

1001 Ways to Catch a Rat

Witnessed by CH Kang, former child prisoner of detention settlement



We children were always so weak and tired that we were not able to help others. We all looked very dirty because we had few opportunities to wash our faces. We looked black like Africans. Many children suffered from pellagra, a killer disease caused by poor nutrition and therefore had skin discoloration around the eyes, making them look, at some distance, like African boys wearing glasses. We were so crazy with hunger that we would try to catch frogs in the stream or rats in the field. We were terribly beaten for eating anything that was not rationed. The severe beatings, however, did not prevent prisoners from eating whatever was available to save their lives from starvation.

Eating rats was so important for survival that prisoners devised all kinds of rat-catching techniques. When we saw a hole in the ground, we knew immediately whether it was a rat hole or not. Children would stick their arms deep into the rat's hole and pick up rats while others looked on with watering mouths.

I felt like vomiting the first time I saw someone eating a rat and said, "I will never eat a rat, never in my life." Alas, soon, I found myself among the children running after and eating rats, frogs and insects.

OH, Boy, My Lucky Day!

- Experienced by CH Kang, former child prisoner of detention settlement



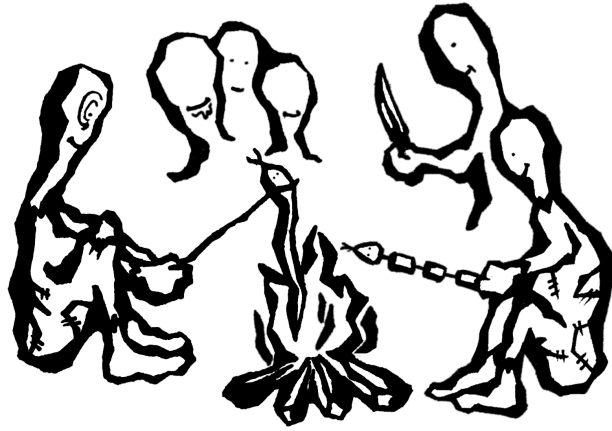
Winters were always so cold without proper shelter, heating, clothing and food that I seriously wondered why man did not have fur like animals to protect them from the piercing winter cold.

One day I was lucky enough to catch a rat. I roasted and ate the meat. It was such a delicacy! Rats were one of the important sources of protein in the settlement. But soon, they became harder to find. People would spend many days and nights to catch one.

I cleaned the hide in the stream and dried it in the shadow. When it was completely dry, the rat hide was smaller than the size of my small palm but it had much needed fur. I thought I could use the fur to protect my knee. But the hide was not as strong as I expected and soon it was torn. Then, I used it for my shoe. It was a perfect fit. It was much better than the dry plants that many of us were using. For prisoners, winters were cruel.

Prisoners Ate Snakes to Survive

Experienced by CH Kang, former child prisoner of detention settlement



Once, one kid said, “My daddy says if you eat three or four snakes in the summer, you won’t feel cold in the winter. And you also get healthier.” We all believed him. So, if we found a snake during work, we would whisper to each other, “Look! It’s a snake!” We would pick up sticks or stones and smash the head of the snake. The dead snake was for everyone who took part in the hunting. We collected dry leaves and firewood. Oh, boy, such a good smell! But you had to be careful with security officers who might be around. Many of us were detected and beaten by security officers for catching and eating snakes. But that did not stop us from hunting snakes because hunger was more serious than “being beaten.”

We also ate frog eggs and, whenever possible, caught fish in the stream. When we were lucky, we caught a squirrel. We ate practically everything except poison. Having survived the first spring in the detention settlement, I found myself to be just like the other children there.

Prisoners Eating Salamanders, Frogs and Anything Else To Stay Alive

Experienced by CH Kang, former child prisoner of detention settlement



As the days passed by, I began to tell myself, “You should not die here like a dog. You must eat anything and stay alive.” I was ready to take part in catching frogs and snakes. Once a friend of mine, working next to me, showed me a salamander he just caught.

“You wanna eat it?” Even though I felt like I could eat anything, I hesitated.

“Never mind,” he said as he put it back into his pocket. I stopped him in a hurry and said,

“I’ll take it, I mean I’ll take it. But you have to show me how to eat it.”

“OK, you watch me.”

He gave me one and produced another from his pocket. He held it up by its tail and swallowed the whole thing, head first. I pushed it into my mouth like he did, but I could not swallow it. The creature was struggling to get out of my mouth. I was frightened. I closed my eyes and bit it hard. My mouth was suddenly full of bitter and stinking juice and I had to spit it out. My friend complained,

“How can you waste such dear meat?”

“I can’t eat it,” I replied.

My friend said, “Don’t chew it. You have to swallow it without chewing. You wanna try again?”

I nodded my head because I needed the meat.

“I am generous with you this time because it was your first time,” my friend added. He gave me another one. This time I was successful and could feel the creature passing through my throat and into my stomach. After this experience, I began to hunt frogs, salamanders, snakes, worms and insects like anybody else here.

We were always so hungry that we even ate worms. When we catch a worm, we dry it on a sunny rock. We eat the worm when it is half-dry.

Once I found a big worm about the size of a big chop stick. I was trying to catch it and it was struggling to get out of my hand. For a moment, I imagined that I was a security officer and the worm was a prisoner.

Soon, other children saw it,

“It’s big! Catch it. If you don’t, I will.”

Then, several children pushed me aside and competed to catch it. Alas, I lost my chance.

I often brought frogs home for my sister. The first time, she did not eat it. Very soon, however, she began to like it like everybody else. Frogs tasted better than worms. Soon, I became an “expert hunter.” Certainly, I felt better after eating the “wild meat.” Perhaps, it was due to the psychological effect of the notion that you had had meat for the day.

Prisoners Harassed by Lice Under Extremely Unsanitary Conditions

Experienced by H. Ahn, former detention settlement prisoner

We were so overworked that we were covered with dust and sweat. Whether we were human beings or beasts, we were barely recognizable. We did not have time to wash our faces and clothes. The bachelors' quarter stunk and was full of lice, fleas and other insects. The men's clothes were covered with crawling lice. If you shook your clothes, an army of lice would sprinkle all over the floor.



When spring comes, the barely recognizable bachelor prisoners spend most of their rest time killing lice. The prisoners are all bone and skin and yet attract so many lice. They take off their clothes, leaving only the pants on, whether there are any women around or not, and begin to smash lice. It is not surprising to find so many lice because prisoners have few opportunities to take baths or wash their clothes. Sometimes, the clothes become so itchy that they just take off their clothes anywhere to shake off or kill the lice. Often, women or young girl prisoners join in to help.

“Well, blood is so precious here. How can we waste the blood from lice?” the prisoners would say. Some prisoners suck lice blood from their nails because the amount of blood is so substantial. The lice are more active during

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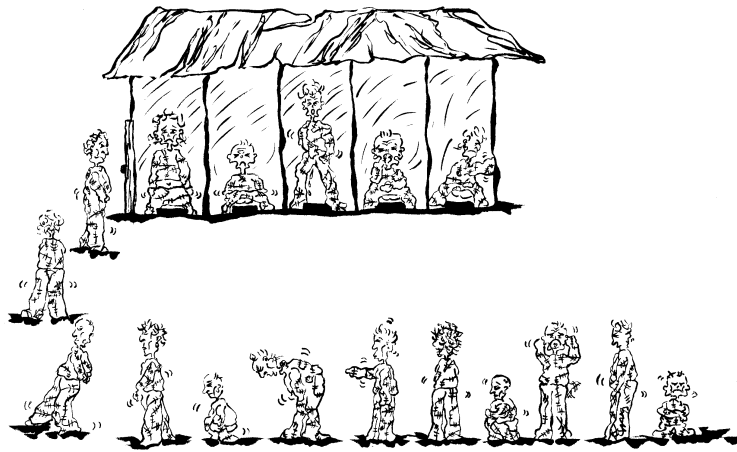
the winter. So, many prisoners keep their clothes outside in the winter night. This is a very effective way of eliminating lice because they find all the lice frozen to death the next morning. They shake off the frozen lice from their clothes and wear them again. Then, they are free from lice for a little while. But this is not always possible at the bachelors' quarters because they sleep collectively.

Thus, the prisoners are tormented by a heavy workload, the brutality of security officers and insects such as lice and fleas.

Prisoners Using Community Toilet

Witnessed by Mr. Hyok Ahn, former detention settlement prisoner

All prisoners in the detention settlement use community toilets. In the mornings, it is common to find scores of prisoners waiting in a long queue. In addition, because there is no toilet paper, they make do with dry leaves of corn, pumpkin, and other plants. When dry leaves are not available, some prisoners carry a round stone as a makeshift toilet paper.



The shelters for the families here are made of earthen walls with poor roofs. Because the walls and floor are earth, dust flies everywhere when the inhabitants move around in the room. The floor is normally covered with straw or mats of drier plants. The roofs have not been repaired for many years and are so rotten that they look like they will fall down any minute, with holes here and there. There is a poorly equipped kitchen for cooking, with a primitive fireplace. There is one electric bulb in the ceiling between the kitchen and the living room, the only electrical facility in the house. Because of the inadequate fireplace and lack of fuel, the living room stays cold throughout the year. The family members must keep warm by embracing each other when sleeping.

This is why cement is one of the most valued items here. Whenever they can, they like to steal a handful of cement to repair holes in their shelter.

Prisoners Can Use Communal Toilets Only Twice a Day

Witnessed by Ms. SO Lee, former political prisoner



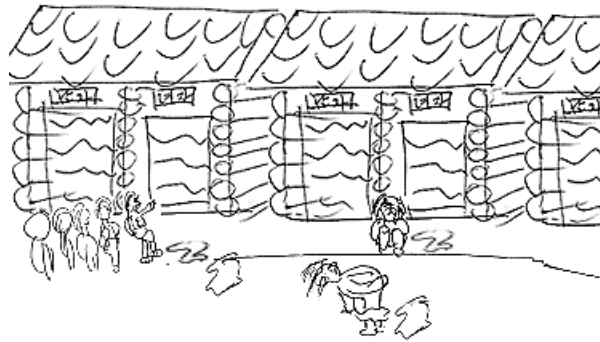
Please note the toilet duty prisoner holding a wooden pass in the above drawing. The prisoner on toilet duty must stay inside the toilet for 17~18 hours a day. They are normally old and crippled women who are not fit to work. They look horrible with faces swollen and yellow from the stench. Some prisoners prefer the job because of the guarantee of a full ration meal, but they normally die within a year.

There is one collective toilet, one meter wide and two meters long, for every 300 prisoners.

Five or six prisoners use the toilet together at the same time. The first group leaves work for the toilet with a wooden pass. Then, they return to work with the pass. The next group is then allowed to visit the toilet collectively with the pass. In this way, the prisoners use the toilet only twice a day in group shifts, not when they need to. The prisoners squat on a slope and evacuate onto a sloped floor. There is only one hole at the end of the toilet.

Communal Toilet for All Prisoners

Witnessed by MC Ahn, former guard of detention settlements



The prisoners' sheds in the settlements are not equipped with toilets. The prisoners often have to wait for a long time before a toilet becomes available for him or her. Sometimes, they cannot wait and, so, evacuate anywhere near the communal toilet in front of other prisoners. Women prisoners do not seem to care to do so in the presence of male prisoners.

No toilet paper is available. Usually, dry leaves or straw is used. It is very stressful to get physically ready for work early in the morning when the toilets are always very crowded.

Patients Left to Die under Quarantine

Witnessed by Ms. Sun-ok Lee, former prisoner of a political prison



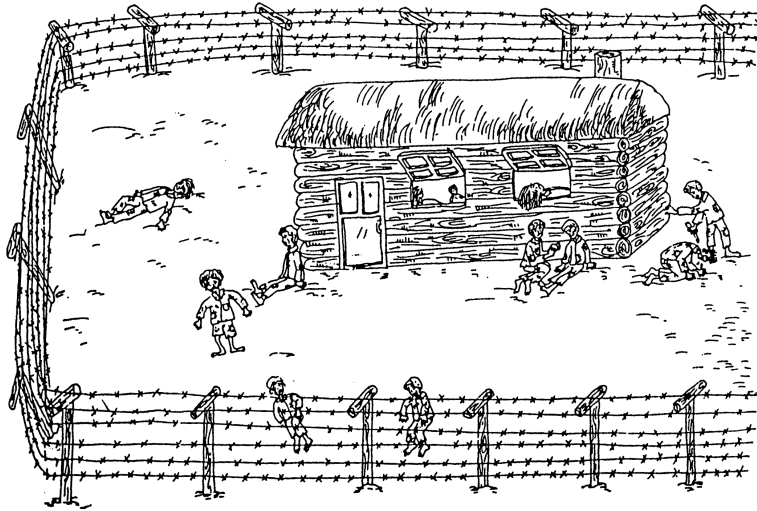
I was sequestered in a patient room and left there to die twice, in 1989 and 1992. Paratyphoid spread among the prisoners in May 1989. Many prisoners complained of pain in the abdomen and high fever before fainting. The prison doctor ordered them quarantined in a small room. Some fifty patients were put into a tiny room, so small that patients were placed on top of one another. Those who were conscious reached out their hands for help; those who were unconscious simply remained underneath and died.

Yong-hi, a 19 year-old girl, was brought to the prison with her mother. She called her mom in a feeble voice for an apple and a little water before she died under the other patients. Her mother was working at the miscellaneous factory and did not know that her daughter perished there.

One day, I woke up to hear the voice of Shin-ok Kim, the prisoner/nurse. "How is it that you are still alive? Everybody else died. Get out from there." I was among the few lucky patients who survived the ordeal. When I somehow recovered from the disease, I was sent to report to the medical room. On this occasion, I witnessed the killing of babies in the medical room. Please refer to Chapter 8, 3) for details about the infanticide.

Patients Quarantined, Abandoned and Left to Die

Witnessed by Mr. MC Ahn, former guard of life detention settlements



Many prisoners suffer from hepatitis, tuberculosis, leprosy and psychiatric diseases due to beatings, poor sanitary conditions, poor diet and degrading treatment. The sick prisoners are quarantined and squeezed into small huts in the mountain. For example, there are two such huts in Settlement No. 22 accommodating some 100 patients. No medical treatment is provided. They are simply left there to die. They do not work, but few ever leave the place alive.

Chapter V

Atrocity and Punishment

The two former detention settlement guards both testify that prison guards are instructed to treat political prisoners mercilessly as beasts and enemies and punish them in any way they wish. Guards are further authorized to kill prisoners for any offense without accounting for it. The former female prisoner testifies that she was told by a prison official on her arrival at the prison, “Remember! You are no longer a human being from now on!”

The dehumanization of the prisoners allows the countless atrocities, cruel punishments, and arbitrary killings to be routine practice in detention settlements and political prisons. These crimes against humanity are not isolated incidents or individual acts, but rather deliberate products of the system of detention settlement and political prison.

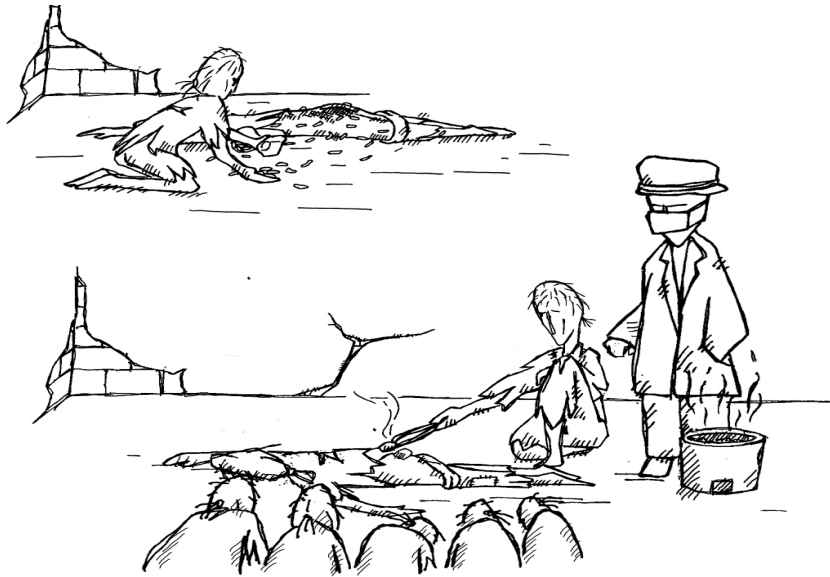
With the security officers and guards being permitted to treat prisoners any way they like, there are several accounts of prisoners being used as targets for martial arts practice. A former prisoner of a detention settlement was himself an actual victim of such brutality while a former guard at life detention settlements and a former female prisoner testify to the same practice.

This chapter provides personal accounts of some of the various atrocities, murderous treatment, and punishment that prisoners experience in the detention settlements and political prison.

The former female political prisoner describes in detail the most dreadful and inhumane conditions of punishment cells in the political prison. Her account is quite vivid as she was actually punished there herself. The other witnesses made frequent references to the dreaded punishment chambers in the detention settlements. However, none of them had been inside such punishment chambers. One of the two former guards, however, tells us about his close observation of a punishment chamber from outside. Apparently, many prisoners die as a result of punishment for minor offense.

Prisoners Die After Spending Time in Punishment Cell

Witnessed by SO Lee, former female prisoner of a political prison



Hun-sik Kim was the principal of Pyongyang Light Engineering College. She was sentenced to a 5-year imprisonment for suggesting to the City Education Board that her students' labor responsibility be reduced so that they could spend more time studying.

In prison, she was assigned the work of measuring fabric to produce jackets, which were to be given as gifts to workers outside by the President on his birthday. One time, she miscalculated the imported nylon fabric but immediately corrected the error and no fabric was wasted. However, she was detained in the punishment cell for ten days for "attempting sabotage." She was crippled and partly paralyzed when she was released from the punishment cell. On a very hot summer day in August, the camp doctors burned her bottom with heated stones to see if she could feel pain. Just before she died a few weeks later, she whispered to me, with a twittered tongue and tears in her eyes, "I want to see the blue sky. You know my children are waiting for me."

When she was released from the punishment cell, she needed two prisoners to help her walk to the work site and back. The camp officials claimed that she was feigning injury, and yelled,

“You bitch! Who do you think you are fooling?”

She was kicked around like a soccer ball by the guards but withstood the insults and beatings for about a month. She suffered injuries all over her body while pulling herself up. The sores began to badly suppurate from the infections. She often fainted. She was sent to the sick room but she had to continue her work in the sick room. I was in the same room because I was a paratyphoid patient. One day in August, the camp doctors burned her with heated stones to see if she could feel pain. I could smell flesh burning, and felt like vomiting and fainting. I remembered what the camp official told me when I first arrived at the camp, “You must give up all your rights as a human!” She never felt any pain when her flesh was burning.

From that day on, she could not control urination and evacuation. I was suffering from a high fever myself but tried my best to caress her burnt wounds with the dirty cloth the doctors gave me. She said to me, with a twittered tongue and tears in her eyes,

“I want to see the blue sky. You know my children are waiting for me.”

The next few days, I felt very sick and was unconscious myself, so nobody looked after her as she kept moaning.

A few days later, I came to myself, crawled to her and removed the cloth from her wound. I was shocked to see the wound full of maggots! She died that night. I shouted to a guard through the small door hole,

“Sir, somebody died here.”

The reply was,

“So what? You bitch! Don’t panic. Wait until morning!”

I found the floor full of maggots the following morning. I had to brush the floor with my bare hands and pick up the maggots into a vinyl bag. I told myself, “You must not die like this. You must survive and tell the whole world about it.”

Prisoners Beaten Cruelly

Witnessed by Sun-ok Lee, former prisoner of a political prison



One common form of torture was to tie a prisoner against iron bars, spread-eagle by hands and legs and beat him all over the body with a rubber or cow skin whip. Just the pain from hanging by your body weight makes the ordeal unbearable. From the beatings, the skin becomes torn all over, blood splashes and the prisoners begin to feel that their skin isn't human any more. When a prisoner is released from the iron bars, his whole body is so swollen that he cannot bend his back or knees. The prisoner must evacuate and urinate standing.

In the Nongpo Police Detention Center, there were three torture chambers and all kinds of torture were routinely practiced on inmates. I was 39 years old at that time. They subjected me to all kinds of torture there.

Once I resisted when they tried to undress me. One of the torturers punched me in my face so hard that I fainted to the floor. Sometime later, I woke up to find my mouth full of something. They were my broken teeth. Obviously, I bled terribly because the floor was full of my blood. My face was so badly swollen that I could hardly open my eyes. I spit out the broken teeth only after holding up my lips with my fingers. Four teeth from the upper jaw were gone. I began to feel terrible pain in my other teeth. Usually, I was taken to the torture chamber at five o'clock in the morning and remained there until midnight.

Punishment Chambers

Witnessed by MC Ahn, former guard of detention settlements



The political prisoners in the detention settlements are sent to punishment cells if they fail to meet daily work quotas, steal corn, or show a less-than-subservient attitude. They are only allowed to go outdoors and get sunlight once a week for 30 minutes. The prisoners, whether male or female, have their hair cut short and must survive on a daily ration of 100 grams of corn cooked with beans and a small bowl of salt soup. The ration is often reduced for minor offenses. So, the prisoners often use their 30 minutes in the sun to eat as much grass or weeds as they can. If they are caught, however, they are beaten by the guards, often to death.

I was able to watch the prisoners leaving and entering the jail from the guard battalion headquarters building. Most of them crawled. Their clothes were full of blood stains and pus from injuries all over. They were full of lice and smelled awful. During the 30 minutes, they were usually busy killing lice and sucking their thumbs wet with lice blood. Whenever possible, they picked up grass and swallowed without chewing. They had been reduced to beasts.

On one occasion, I saw an old prisoner caught eating grass. The guard hit his chin hard with the handle of his AK 58 gun and shouted, "You dirty old

dog!” When the prisoner bent down while holding his bleeding mouth, the guard hit him on his back. He fell to the ground. The guard kicked his head very hard, but the prisoner remained motionless. Blood poured out from his nose and mouth. The other prisoners were ordered to return to their cells. Most of them could not walk. They simply crawled. There were a few guys who could walk, obviously newcomers. Those who could walk were helping others move back to their cells.

A little later, I saw the same guard and chief jail officer checking the prisoner’s pulse. They confirmed his death. They rolled the body in a straw mat and loaded it onto a small truck that went in the direction of Namsok district, the secret killing field in the steep mountain areas.

After the incident, I saw the same guard on the same duty. He was never punished for killing the prisoner.

Punishment Cells, Chambers of Death

Experienced by Sun-ok Lee, former prisoner of a political prison



The punishment cell is one of the most dreaded punishments for all prisoners. The cells are usually 60 cm wide and 110 cm high. Therefore, the prisoners have no room to stand up, stretch their legs or lie down. They cannot even lean against the walls because they are too jagged. There are twenty such cells for female prisoners and 58 cells for male prisoners. They are usually detained for seven to ten days as punishment for certain offenses, such as leaving an oily mark on clothes, failing to memorize the president's New Year message or repeated failure to meet work quotas.

When the prisoners are released from the cells, their legs are badly bent, with frostbite in the winter, so they can hardly walk. Many victims are permanently crippled from the lack of adequate exercise and eventually died as a result of the work resumed immediately after the release. The prisoners call the punishment cell "Chilsong Chamber," meaning a black angel's chamber of death.

In November 1989, I was detained in the punishment cell for a week for attempting to cover-up a faulty piece of shirt made by a 20 year-old girl. The young girl was sent to the torture chamber and never seen again. Among other things, the freezing cold wind from the toilet hole made the experience extremely painful. During the summer, the prisoners struggle to brush thousands of maggots back into the toilet hole.

After being released, I had problems walking for 15 days but I was able

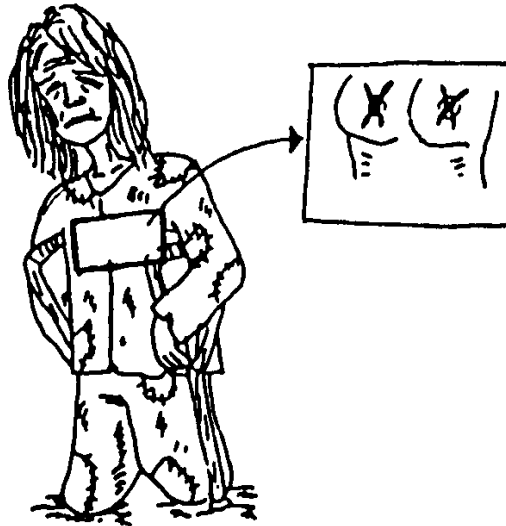
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to recover because my job gave me the needed opportunity to walk to all corners of the prison with work instructions.

They say it is a day of great fortune if a prisoner finds a rat creeping up from the bottom of the toilet hole. The prisoners catch it with their bare hands and devour it raw, as rats are the only source of meat in the prison. They say the wonderful taste of a raw rat is unforgettable. If they are caught eating a rat, however, the punishment is extended. So they have to be very careful when catching and eating a rat.

Fate of a Young Girl

Witnessed by Mr. MC Ahn, former guard of detention settlements



Jin-dok Han was brought to Detention Settlement No. 22 when she was only seven years old. When I met her for the first time in the summer of 1991, she was a pretty 26-year-old girl who worked with plaster and in the tunnels. She was different from the other prisoners because she tried to maintain human dignity and smile at other prisoners, a very rare quality among prisoners.

I came to know her when I was in charge of keeping pigsties. One day, she was severely beaten, gang raped, her womanhood ruined and her breasts burned as punishment for engaging in sexual activity with a guard officer. She was then sent to hard labor in a coal mine at Unit 43 in the Kulsan sector, where her legs were severed in a gallery trolley accident.

During the summer of 1991, I was playing my guitar one day, singing a South Korean song in my pig farm office during lunch time. When I stopped playing to go prepare slops, I found a female prisoner, JD Han, running away from my window. Obviously, she was listening to my music. When I stopped her, she came to me bowing deeply, a requirement of prisoners in front of officers or guards. She was terrified by my stopping her and I was so sorry about it.

I asked her, "You heard the music, right?" She replied, "Yes, Sir, I am

sorry.” I said, “Then, don’t repeat it to others. OK, now, you go.” But she did not go away and hesitated for a little while. She finally said, “Sir, please teach me the beautiful song.” I told her no, knowing the danger it could entail. She said, “Sir, the tunnel prisoners are all so grateful to you for your help and kindness to us. I know what it means to you and me. I will not endanger you under any circumstance. We are not beasts. We remember your kindness. Please teach me the song.” I was fully aware of the risk involved, the possibility of being dismissed from the service with a severe punishment. But I remembered that the prisoners here never betrayed my confidence in them in the past months. So, I gave her the song words and allowed her to listen to my music outside my office. This is how I first came to know her.

Her father was an animal doctor in Anmyong district, Kangwon Province, North Korea. Her uncle was an army colonel when he was purged with the Defense Minister in 1973. She was only 7 years old when security officers broke into her house at night and brought the whole family here. Her father disappeared when he was ordered to join a group of strong prisoners for special work. She did not have proper clothing and was always hungry. When she told me about herself with tears, I felt as though she could be my elder sister. Since then, I secretly helped her whenever I could.

A few weeks after my reassignment from the pig farm to another task late in the year, I heard one day that she was arrested for sexual relations with a guard officer. I was very worried that under torture she might reveal her personal relation with me. Many weeks passed and nothing happened to me; she, indeed, kept her promise. I thought she was killed however.

Therefore, I couldn’t believe my eyes when I saw her walking one day in March the following year, 1993, while I was driving to my headquarters. She was an entirely different person, so wretched, all bone and skin. She was happy to see me and her face contorted when she tried to smile.

I shouted at her, “I can’t believe it. You are still alive! What happened to you?” She replied, “I should have died rather than live a miserable life here. I was severely tortured and gang raped by officers who ruined my womanhood. I am no longer a woman now. They spared my life because I was their informant. Now, look here!” She unbuttoned her shirt and showed me her breasts, full of wounds and pus. It was so shocking, and her breasts were stinking with wounds. “They burned my breasts. The wounds never heal! I am now a punished miner which means that I get reduced meals and stay underground

for 24 hours. I have been working there for three months now. They thought I might die any minute now so they allowed me to walk to the clinic.”

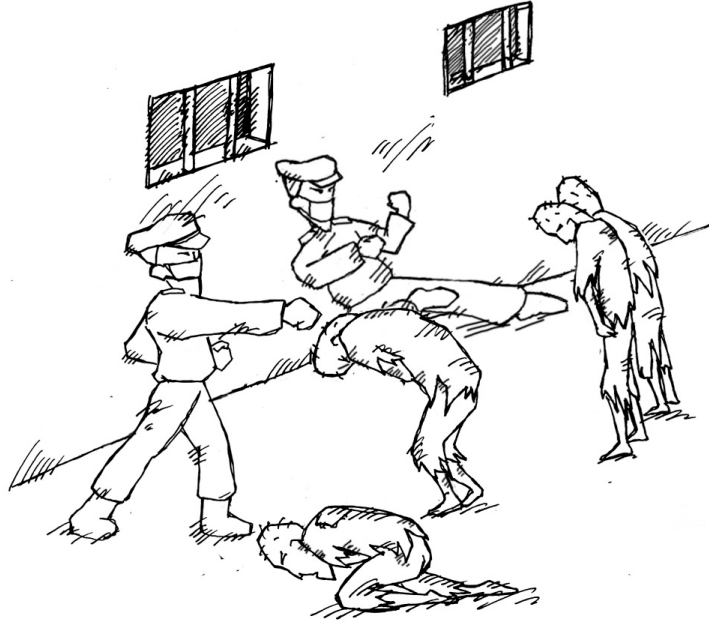
“I am terribly sorry about what happened to you. I will get some medicine for you. I am sorry we can’t talk like this any more. We must be going.” I was crying deeply in my heart as I left her. She said, “Sir, I’ll never forget your kindness. Thank you and good-bye.”

I got some antibiotic ointment and tried to find her but she disappeared. In October, 1993, about a year later, I was so surprised to find her among a group of old and crippled women at the corn farm.

I asked her, “Where were you? What happened to your legs.” “I had my legs severed in a trolley accident in the mine,” she replied. “When?” I asked her. “Three days after I met you last.” I could not ask her any more questions because I did not want to hurt her by reminding her of the tragic memories.

Prisoners Used for Martial Arts Practice

Witnessed by Sun-ok Lee, former female prisoner of political prison

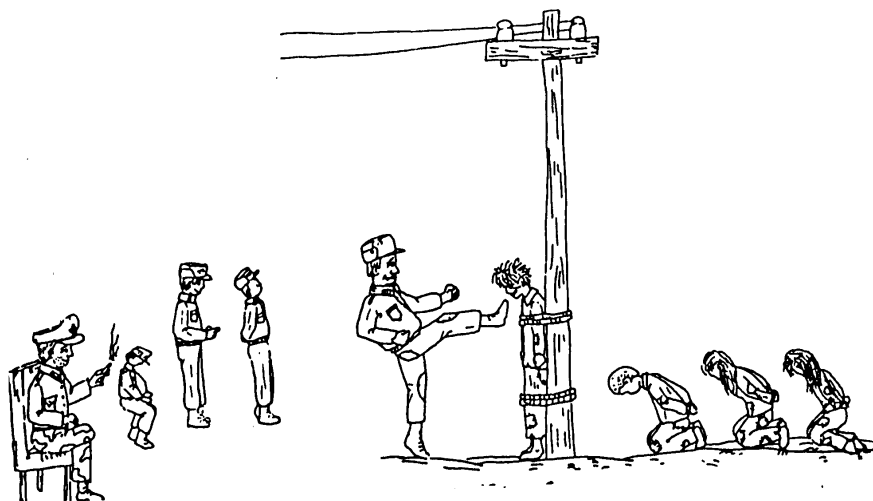


A prisoner in the police jails becomes a different person, skin and bone, from starvation and torture. Male prisoners appear to become undernourished and confused sooner than female prisoners. The jail guards commonly use inmates as martial arts target. They punch and kick prisoners during martial arts practice. The prisoners fall bleeding at the first blow and remain motionless for a while on the cement floor until they are kicked back into the cells.

The guards often bring fish and grill it on their stove, sending a wonderful aroma to the prisoners. This is as painful as any form of torture could be for the starving inmates.

Political Prisoners Used as Martial Arts Targets

Witnessed by Mr. MC Ahn, former guard of detention settlements



One day in April 1988, in Life Imprisonment settlement No. 22, we were conducting routine military drills when Lt. MC Choi, my platoon commander, spotted ten prisoners watching us as they passed by. He stopped them and asked them to come. The prisoners all went down on their knees, trembling and begging, "We will not watch you practice again. Please forgive us." He said, "You s.o.b! Shut up! Stand up, move forward! Turn left..." He made them stand in the center of the training ground. One of our old timers said, "What a great opportunity! I am going to practice a side kick today." Another guard said, "I am going to finish up my full roundhouse today." Then, the commander began lecturing to us, "It is because of the people's enemy like them, beasts, that the Leader can't sleep well at night and that we are training hard here today. So, today, you must practice your martial art techniques to be ready to crush our enemy in one blow at any time... I'll have to check the ideology of anyone who shows them any compassion..." Ten of the newcomers were told to surround the prisoners so that they could not escape. First, two prisoners were tied up against poles two meters apart.

The commander called each guard one by one and they began to kick and punch the prisoners until all ten prisoners were finished. The prisoners cried with pain. Most of them bled from the nose and mouth and suffered broken teeth and ribs. None of them were able to walk normally afterwards. They were limping and helping each other when they were told to hurry off

immediately.

North Korea produced two martial arts movies in 1986, “*Hong Kil Tong*” (the Korean version of Robin Hood) and “*Order No. 027*.” Since then, it has become common practice for the guards in the prison settlements to reenact some of the scenes from these movies by practicing martial arts using political prisoners as targets.

Frankly, we newcomers envied the old-timers for the opportunity to practice what they had learned and we looked at them with admiration, but we were very shocked and trembled with fear when we saw the victims bleeding and groaning with pain.

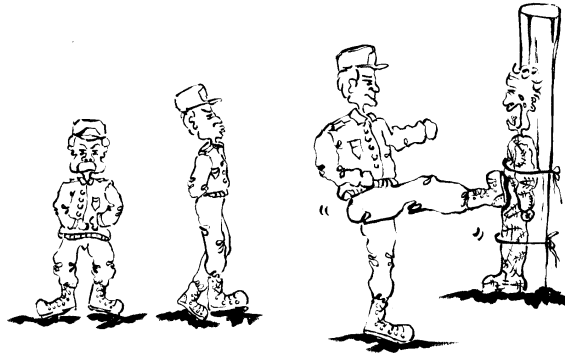
The officers encouraged the guards to use political prisoners for kicking and punching practice. Through casual conversations with my colleagues, I learned that this was common at all the detention settlements.

Prisoners Beaten for Martial Arts Practice

Experienced by Mr. Hyok Ahn, former detention settlement prisoner

We were tied against poles. One of the guards reported to the officer, “Sir, we are ready.” The officer replied, “Good! Show them a lesson!”

Then, one of the guards shouted at me, “Death to the US imperial aggressor, Yah!” and kicked me hard under my chin with his boot. We were terrified and begged for forgiveness. Our pleas were useless.



The guards started to practice various martial arts kicks and punches all over our bodies. I was kicked in my groin so hard that I almost fainted and felt myself urinating and evacuating. I felt blood gushing into my throat and could smell it. One of the guards pushed my head up, called me a “beast” and spat on my bleeding face. The beatings continued throughout the whole evening. In the end, we were bloody with wounds all over before we finally fainted. We were tied up at around six o’clock in the evening and released about 10 o’clock the following morning.

Late one afternoon, my team was collecting stones and, by chance, found pig bones amongst the kitchen garbage of guards. We took the bones, crushed them and began to boil them in a makeshift pan. We hoped that the soup from the bones would rid us of pellagra, a disease that results from malnutrition and is common among prisoners.

Unfortunately, some guards on patrol discovered us boiling the bones,

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kicked the pan off the fire, yelled, “Who’s cooking here? You disobeyed the instruction not to touch anything that belongs to guards! All of you stop working right now. I will show you a lesson. Tie them up!” Three of us were tied up against poles and some twenty guards began preparing for martial arts attacks.

They kicked and beat us one by one for several hours until we all fainted.

Because we so terribly stank of blood, urine and feces, the guards made other prisoners untie us. All of us fell to the ground when released. Although this place was a hell -- a place where no prisoners help one another -- some kind hearted-prisoners wept for us, took us to a nearby stream, undressed and cleaned us. I did not feel cold at all. I wanted to shout aloud to show my anger but I had to control it. I wept quietly and tried to remember the faces of the guards so that I may take revenge on them one day.

Woman Prisoners Risk Life for Gauze

Witnessed by Mr. MC Ahn, former guard of detention settlements



After a warehouse fire was extinguished, a security officer ordered for the bodies of all prisoners to be searched. “Anyone discovered with even a single grain of rice will be punished!” he shouted.

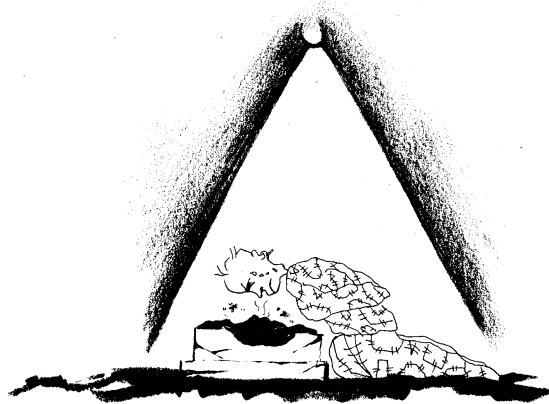
Prisoners were lined up and ordered to show their pockets inside out and show their groins inside their pants, men and women alike. When the security officer stopped a young woman prisoner, her face turned pale. She sat on her knees and begged, “Sir, I will never do it again. Please don’t kill me.” He found some 20 rolls of gauze inside her pants. She said she needed them for a sanitary belt and brassiere. No female prisoners receive any ration of sanitary napkins or brassiers in the settlement. The young guards enjoyed seeing a young woman naked at the bottom.

Four other female prisoners were also arrested for stealing gauze and socks from the burning warehouse. They were all sent to jail for three months. One of them died during punishment in jail and the others were permanently crippled when they were released from jail after three months.

I was Forced to Face a Toilet Hole for Punishment

Experienced by Mr. Hyok Ahn, former detention settlement prisoner

In January, 1986, I was detained at the National Security Headquarters in Manpo City, North Korea, for unauthorized travel to China. The cell was dark and 2.1 m x1.5 m, just a small dark space. I was ordered to get down on my knees, my face looking forward, my hands on my lap, and remain motionless. There was no sunlight in the cell and all kinds of insects -- lice, fleas, cockroaches -- were crawling on my body. The uncomfortable feeling and itchiness made me move slightly. I was badly beaten so many times for any slight movements that my teeth and nose were broken and I could feel blood running into my throat. I was very hungry but I could not eat at all after the beatings. Then, I was beaten again for not eating. Not a day passed without being beaten severely.



Like many other prisoners there, I suffered from constipation that was caused by a lack of movement and exercise. With permission, I sometimes used the toilet in the corner, which was connected to the dung pit right below. However, I couldn't evacuate my bowels immediately. The guard shouted at me, "You think you can fool me by relaxing on the toilet? Get on your knees and put your head into the toilet hole!" I remained in that position for two hours. I could overcome the awful stench but the pain from bending my back and neck for two hours was unbearable. I told myself that death was a hundred times better than this.

My broken nose and teeth hurt so much that I suddenly remembered

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somebody saying that biting a cockroach would reduce the pain. I was able to pick up a cockroach from my belly and bite it with my aching teeth without detection. When I bit it, I could feel the juice squirting out but luckily I could not smell because my nose was broken.

One day, I could not take it anymore and I went wild yelling, “Yes, you can kill me!” Three guards rushed into my cell, “Yah? You want to die? Don’t you see you have no rights here, whatsoever? Of course, we can kill you!” and mercilessly beat me and smashed my whole body with boots and logs until I fainted and felt nothing. They could not have possibly beaten even their parents’ murderers any worse. How can a human being treat another human being so brutally?

Punished for Accidentally Smearing the Leader's Picture on a Newspaper

Witnessed by Mr. Hyok Ahn, former detention settlement prisoner

All prisoners are expected to memorize the entire text of the Great Leader's New Year's message. Failure to memorize the text is considered to be "ideologically suspicious" and therefore, subject to investigation. It is very stressful and difficult to memorize lines when engaged in hard work. The surprise call always frightened us because of the fear that one of us could be the next victim.

In January, 1998, we were assembled for a surprise call, a prelude to a new tragedy for someone. "Those of you who have a fountain pen come forward!" The bachelor prisoners, who looked dirty and miserable, trembled with confusion and fright. Several prisoners stepped forward and answered questions. The security officer produced a newspaper and asked, "Who dropped ink on the New Year message in this newspaper?" There was a small drop of ink on the caption under the picture of "the Great Leader." "Such a big fuss over such a small thing?" I thought to myself. One of the prisoners was chosen and beaten brutally.

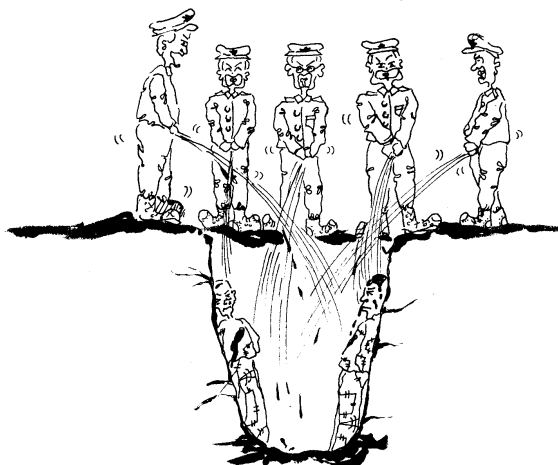


He pleaded, "Sir! I didn't do it. Believe me I didn't do it." But the officers were deaf to his appeals. We felt sorry for him but thought that it was better than being killed. He was taken to the investigation office and none of us saw or heard of him again. Sometimes, I remembered him with sadness but I did not have too much time to dwell on it because I had my own serious problems.

Guards Urinate on Prisoners for Fun

Experienced by Mr. Hyok Ahn, former detention settlement prisoner

I cannot forget the degrading treatment we received one summer day in 1998 while working on the construction of bullet-proof walls. In the morning, we collected heavy stones and dug a 2 meter deep trench. After a quick lunch, we felt so tired that we leaned against the wall in the bottom of the trench and momentarily dozed.



Suddenly, we felt lukewarm water on our faces. At first, we thought it was raining. When we opened our eyes, we heard a voice from above say, "Don't move or we will kill you!" Several guards were pissing on us but we could not move. "Hey, you s.o.bs! Open up your mouths so we can hit the target," they laughed. We stood there motionless until they all finished pissing. It seemed like forever.

Meeting the work quota requires extremely hard work. I do not remember how many times I fainted while working in the mountains to meet the quota. Collecting topsoil from a high mountain five or six times a day made me feel dizzy and slip down the slope many times. When the wind is strong, the prisoners are so weak that they often fell with the wind. The security officers always laughed at us when we fell with the wind.

Once, Huh Kang-chol and I were engaged in topsoil collection work for about seven days. We were the two youngest and weakest prisoners in the team and often failed to meet the daily quota. We were brought to an “ideology session” where prisoners were encouraged to accuse and beat each other. “The two young ones don’t work hard enough. They do not deserve meals.” “Don’t you see that everyone else is working hard?” “Don’t give them food.” They kicked us and punched us fiercely. Finally, our food ration was reduced from 120 grams to 90 grams a day. A ninety-gram meal means three or four spoonfuls of hard corn. We received the corn with our clothes, rubbed it until the grains of corn become starchy and softer. Then, we mixed it with wild plants to increase the quantity. I was so hungry that I kept eating snow while working. Kang-chol often quietly wept under the blanket.

Chapter VI

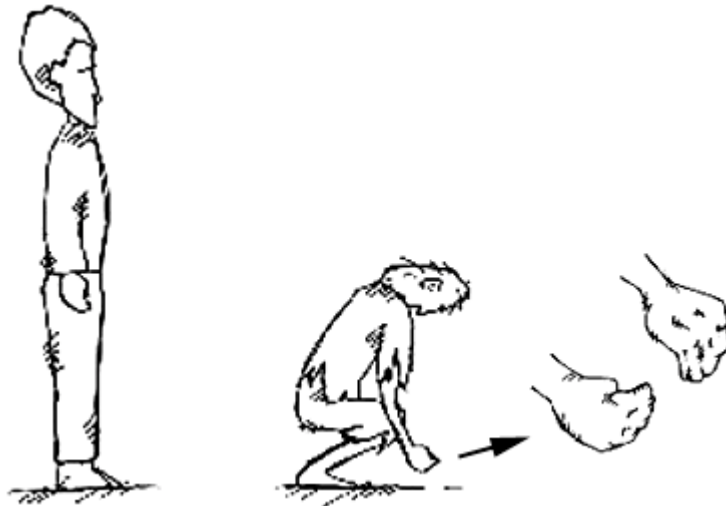
Torture

The testimonies of all the witnesses converge on the fact that torture is openly and widely practiced at all stages in North Korea. The entire process of treatment of political prisoners appears to be a continuing process of all kinds of torture. The different kinds of torture vary in purpose and method but all are characterized by their unbelievable cruelty.

This chapter describes some of the various methods of torture as well as their victims.

School Principal, a Torture Victim

Witnessed by Sun-ok Lee, former prisoner of a political prison



When he was arrested.

After two years in the jail

In 1987, a school principal in Chongjin city found two female teachers murdered the previous night in the night duty chamber of the school. He immediately reported the murders to the police. When the police made little progress in the investigation, they arrested him for murder. He was subject to all kinds of severe torture for two years and forced into confessing the murder.

When I saw him in the police jail, both his ears were gone with only ear holes in their place. I have no idea how it happened but his fingers were cut short and clustered together. He was badly crippled, one leg shorter than the other, and unable to walk. His mouth was slanted and he could not control his lips, which made it very difficult to understand what he said. He was a tall and handsome person before he was arrested but became as short as a ten year-old boy during the two years in the police jail.

He was the principal of Subok Girls' High school in Chongjin City, North Hamkyong Province. He devoted his entire life to education as a career teacher.

He pleaded innocent throughout the severe tortures. Two years later, two criminals were arrested for robbery and confessed that they had snuck into the school to steal an organ, found two women teachers, and murdered them after an unsuccessful attempt at rape.

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Nobody was punished or held responsible for arresting the wrong person. There was no apology. Rather, the provincial police forced him to sign a statement that he would never disclose that he had been tortured. He was completely disabled and received no compensation. He died shortly after his release.

This incident shows how incompetent the normal North Korean police investigators are and, as a result, how they commonly torture innocent victims to extract false confessions.

Tearing Off the Ears of a Prisoner

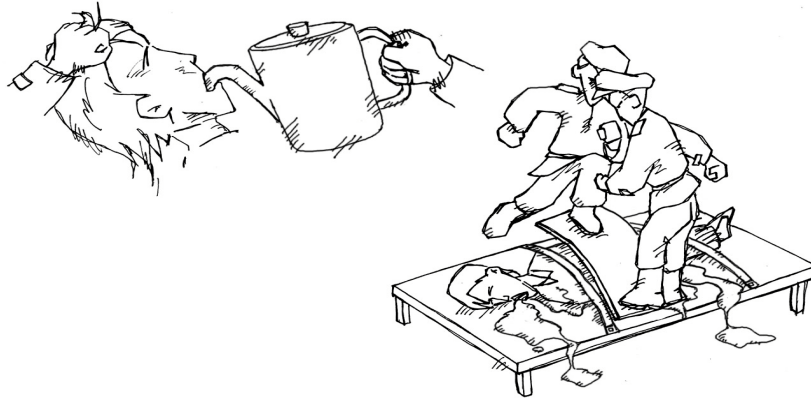
Witnessed by Sun-ok Lee, former prisoner of a political prison



The Comptroller of the Seamen's Club of Chongjin City was an old man, 60 years old. He could no longer withstand the tortures that continued daily. When the investigators tore off one of his ears and began tearing off the other, he decided to please the investigators by claiming to be a big thief -- the bigger the better. So, he told them that he stole a locomotive from the city railway station. He acquired the nickname, "locomotive head" from the police investigators and officers.

Water Torture

Experienced by Sun-ok Lee, former prisoner of a political prison



One day in early March 1997, I was taken into a torture chamber that I had never been in before. I saw a big kettle on a small table and a low wooden table with straps, about 20 centimeters high. By surprise, one of the two interrogators tripped me with his leg. They strapped me on to the table and forced the kettle spout into my mouth. The spout was made so that it forced my throat wide open and I could not control the water running into my body. Close to suffocation, I had to breathe through my nose. My mouth was full of water and it overflowed from my nose. As I began to faint from the pain and suffocation, I could not see anything but felt sort of afloat in the air. I had been through all kinds of torture, such as whippings, beatings with rubber bands or hard sticks, or hand twisting with wooden sticks between my ten fingers, but this was worse.

I do not remember how long it lasted but when I woke up I felt two interrogators jumping on a board which was laid on my swollen stomach to force water back out of my body. I suddenly vomited and kept vomiting with terrible pain.

I had no idea how much water ran into my body but I felt like the cells in my body were full of water and water was running out of my body through my mouth, nose, anus and vagina.

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I faintly heard somebody saying, “Why doesn’t this bitch wake up. Did she die?” I could not get up so I was dragged to my cell that day. From that day on, I suffered from high fever and often fainted. My whole body was so swollen that I could not open my eyes. I could only urinate a few drops of milk-like liquid with blood and felt a severe pain in my bladder. I was able to get up and walk again in about two week’s time.

I cannot explain how I could have survived such an ordeal. I would have died if that had happened to me in my ordinary life. I must have developed a mysterious super power to sustain myself under an emergency situation.

Snake Torture

Report by MC Ahn, former guard of detention settlements
Common knowledge among guards at Settlement No. 13



A 26 year-old female prisoner was caught writing a letter in jail at Life Detention Settlement No. 13 in the winter of 1986. She was badly tortured to make her confess who gave her the paper and pen. She refused to confess. Then, the chief jail officer used a big snake for torture. When she regained consciousness from a splash of water, she was shocked to find a snake entering her body. She quickly revealed Sgt. Choi as the person who gave her the paper and pen. Furious that one of his own men was involved, the interrogator continued to torture her to make her confess how many times they had sexual intercourse. Assisting a prisoner is already a very serious crime, but having sexual relations with a prisoner is even more serious because it means treating a prisoner as a human being.

She vehemently denied having sex with him. They told her that she would be pardoned if she sucked a dog's penis and she did so, but the torture continued for days in the presence of a colonel (a deputy chief political officer) and a major (an ideology officer) and the torture chamber was filled with her screams. They pushed a thick heated iron stick into her vagina and screwed it deeper each time she said no. She had withstood the torture for about two hours when she finally said, "Yes, five times." The chief jail officer was embarrassed in the presense of the other officers that one of his men had sexual relations with a prisoner so he kicked the iron stick into her body, the

whole length of some 70 centimeters, and killed her. They say she died with her eyes open.

The girl, Pok-tok Kim, was 26 years old at that time. She came to North Korea from Japan with her parents in 1962. Her father was arrested for the charge of spying and she and her mother were sent to the life detention settlement when she was only 17 years old. Her mother ate less and less to provide more food for her child and, eventually, died of starvation in the settlement. The girl was left alone in the settlement and, one day, she pleaded innocence to the authorities and, as a result, was jailed for ideological corruption. She suffered from brutal beatings and starvation in the jail.

She was a pretty girl and Sgt. Chul-nam Choi, a jail guard, secretly brought her food from his home out of sympathy. One day in October, 1986, about 9 months before my arrival, PT Kim asked Sgt. Choi to give her some paper and a pen so that she could write a letter to her rich relative in Japan. She promised him a car or enough cash to buy a car when she got some help from her relative. Sgt. Choi gave her a piece of paper and a pen.

Later on, another jail guard became suspicious of her because she looked considerably better off physically than the other prisoners, who were all bone and skin. He secretly watched her and finally caught her writing a letter. The chief jail officer treated the matter confidentially because he suspected one of his men was involved and asked political and ideology officers to join him in investigating her. She withstood all kinds of torture and kept saying, "I wanted to write a letter myself. That's all."

Unaware of her arrest and what was happening to her, Sgt. Choi one day brought a big snake that he had caught in the orchard to the office. He was going to make snake wine with it. The chief jail officer took the snake from him and, after Sgt. Choi left the office at the end of the day, used it to torture the girl.

A series of strict ideology re-education sessions followed for security officers and guards after this incident.

Sgt. Choi was fired, deprived of party membership, and sent to a remote mine to work as a miner for the rest of his life. Some of my colleagues who had been to his home town on official trips returned saying that he lived a beggar's life without a home.

Freezing Torture

Witnessed by Sun-ok Lee, former prisoner of a political prison



One winter night in 1987 when I was under investigation at the Chongjin Police Station, the interrogator yelled, “Bitch! You’ve been spoiled by the warmth in the interrogation room. I’m gonna teach you a lesson!” He made me sit outside wearing my underclothes only. It was freezing cold outside. I was showered with a bucket of cold water and left on my knees for an hour. It was here where I saw other prisoners for the first time. There were some ten prisoners on their knees before me on the ground looking like grotesque boulders. The freezing torture was repeated every night throughout the winter. Six prisoners died from this torture.

There were some ten prisoners on their knees before me on the ground. I was told to sit in the front. I walked through the other prisoners to the front. It was so cold that the guard went right back into the office. I heard a low voice, “Hey, Comrade Sun-ok, it’s me here!” It was Young-hwan Choi, the Supply Manager of Hweryung District! Soon, I was able to recognize the familiar faces of five former colleagues. They had all been arrested under the same false charges that I was. They all realized that if they died from the torture, they would be perishing under false charges. So they all displayed strong will power to overcome the torture and survive.

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However, I witnessed a total of 6 prisoners die from this freezing torture during the winter. The cold was very painful on my hands, legs and ears for the first 20 to 30 minutes. But after that, I felt nothing at all. When we were told after one hour to get up, we were literally frozen and could not stand up. We all fell several times before we somehow managed to rise and stumble back into our cold cells.

Soon, I had large swollen ears. My feet were so swollen that I could not put on my shoes. Water was running from the sores in my swollen legs. When I finally left the interrogation center and arrived at the prison, a prison official told me to apply pine resin from the shoe-making factory. The resin melted all my flesh and I could see some of the bones in my feet. However, because of the resin, fresh flesh began to cover the bones and, after six months, I had normal feet again. I cannot remember when my swollen ears recovered.

Chapter VII

Children in Detention

One of the witnesses in this analysis includes Mr. Chul-hwan Kang who, at the age of nine, was detained in the primary detention settlement with his family in 1977. He was detained with his family as a result of spy charges against his grandfather. Mr. Kang was released in 1987. His accounts describe the 10 years he spent in the settlement and largely addresses the treatment of children there. According to Mr. Kang, the school teachers, who are security officers, treat the children as enemies and no different from the other adult prisoners.

In addition, one of the former guards tells a story about two schoolgirls who are partly devoured by guard dogs in one of the life detention settlements. All the accounts reveal that children are not protected.

Children Routinely Carry Heavy Loads

Witnessed by CH Kang, former child prisoner of detention settlement



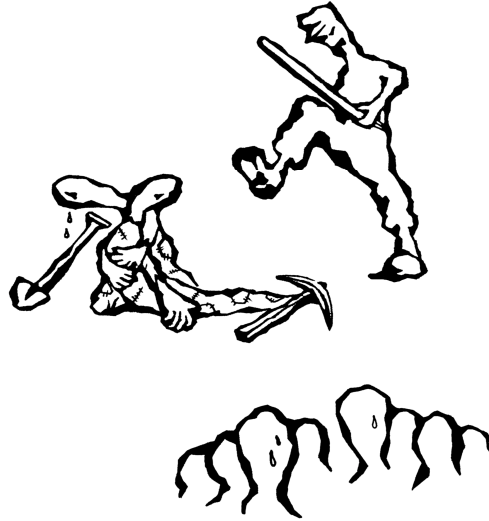
During the autumn season, my task was to carry earth from the hill behind the school to the riverside. I did not know how to do the work at first so I just followed what the other children were doing. The weight of the dirt on an A-frame was 30 kilograms and I was only ten years old. I had to make the trip carrying the dirt 30 times a day. By any standard, the work was too much for small children like us. But no one ever dared to complain. I managed to make the first ten rounds. Then, I felt my shoulder skin come off, my legs shaking and my body starting to collapse. The teachers were watching us very closely and mercilessly beat us with a stick if we stopped.

One of the children fell over a tree root. He tried very hard to get up again but was so worn out that he fell again. His lips were broken and his hands were bleeding. The teacher rushed to him and raised his stick. I closed my eyes because I was fed up with watching so many children bleed from beatings.

The teacher said to him, "I will give you one more chance because you are a newcomer." He kept scolding him for being weak and not yet getting used to the work but did not beat him this time. He told the other children digging ground, "Give him less load." But the poor child was very weak and unable to even sustain himself. The teacher said, "OK! Let him take a rest for a little while." The boy lied down under a tree.

Like the adult prisoners here, children were full of anger at each other under such difficult living conditions. His taking a rest meant more work for the other children under the collective work quota system. Children passing by all swore at him and one of them even kicked him, saying, "Hey, you good for nothing! Don't try to be smart! Get up and work!"

I was Brutally Beaten for Trying to Help a Friend **Experienced by CH Kang, former child prisoner of detention settlement**



In the autumn, with most of the strenuous root collection work having been completed, we were given firewood work. We were instructed to carry 20 ~ 30 kgs. of firewood to school, some three kilometers, six times a day. We did not have any wood-carrying equipment. When I put the first load on my shoulder and moved a few steps, I already felt my shoulder breaking and my feet shaking. I had to stop three or four times on the way before I reached school.

When I finished my 4th round and started on my way back to work, I saw my friend, Wung-mo, lying on the ground motionless. I approached him and tried to wake him up. "Hey, Wung-mo, get up. Quick! They will beat you to death if they find out." I tried to help him up with my arms under his arm pits. He didn't move. He couldn't even talk. I pushed his load of firewood aside, pulled him under a tree nearby and laid him down comfortably.

Suddenly, I felt the strong blow of a stick on my back. "Who told you to help him?" It was the teacher. Even before I was able to get up, I was hit several more times. "You s.o.b., you better get back to work." I rolled over to escape his beatings, then I saw him beginning to mercilessly kick at my friend. "I know you are cheating. Get up!" The boy did not move.

The days were getting colder and we were instructed to hurry up with our firewood work. The oldest boys were given the work of cutting down trees high

up in the mountain, the second group of boys cutting down the trees to the right size with saws, the third group carrying the wood down to the foot of the mountain and the youngest boys carrying the short wood to school.

Another boy fell on his fifth round. I tried very hard to finish my work because if I did not accomplish my work quota, the other boys would have to do more work. I did not want them to think I was not strong enough. But, I could not take it anymore and I fell into a ditch near my school on the 6th round. The whole world looked yellow to me. I felt so weak without any strength in my trembling feet, before I finally fainted. When I woke up some time later, I saw that three other boys had fainted like I did.

The other boys were angry with us because they had to do more work under the collective work quota system. As the boys passed by us, one of them said, “Hey, don’t try to be smart, eh?” Others joined, “Don’t you know it is also as difficult for us as it was for you? We do it so why don’t you?” They all spat angry words at us. I could not blame them.

First, I was angry with my grandfather because I was suffering from all these hardships because of him. Then, I asked, “What was his sin anyway?” They say he betrayed the fatherland and people. But, how? I don’t know any details of his sin.” Then, I came to wonder, “Why am I punished because of his crime, anyway?” I could not understand, why...why...why?

Cruel Punishment for Children

Witnessed by CH Kang, former child prisoner of detention settlement

One afternoon, we were brought back to school from work to watch my



teacher punish six children who stopped work to eat cherries in the hill. Their lips and hands were stained black with cherry juice.

“On your hands and legs! Put your body weight on your hands and move backward!” he said to them. He kicked one of the children and yelled, “Bend your back!” When the children moved half way across the school playground, their palms began to bleed. I felt like vomiting at the sight. Girls were sobbing and other children trembled with fear.

The children wept and begged, “Sir! Please forgive us and don’t kill us.” He showed no sympathy. He kicked them and beat them if they stopped. One of the children could no longer continue and held up his hands. The teacher kicked him hard in the face, smashed his torn hands and made him continue. Other children fell down and could no longer continue. He told them to get up and show him their palms. At the center of the bleeding palm, the cherry stains still remained. He made them do it again and move in a circle around the playground. He finally stopped them and told us, “See what will happen to you if you stop work, you got it?”

The six children were told to work with their torn and bleeding hands three hours longer than the other children do that day.

Children Standing for Over Twenty Hours for Punishment

Experience by CH Kang, former child prisoner of detention settlement



One morning, we arrived at school and found the teacher's bicycle badly ruined, with the rims broken and the battery damaged. The teacher, who had the nickname "old fox," was furious and shouted, "Who did it? Come out before I crush your heads."

Because we were so frequently beaten for not keeping the bicycle spotlessly clean, I hated it. I was pleased with what had happened. "Obviously, somebody else felt the same way as I did," I thought.

"None of you will go home for days, weeks or months until I find out who did it. All of you stand here and don't move!" We stood there without meals and water until the following morning. It was so painful and torturous. I felt my legs shaking and saw stars in my eyes. Nobody surrendered. I felt like I was drifting like a cloud with my legs hanging in the air. He sat on a comfortable chair in front of us. In the morning, young guards joined him and punched and kicked us at random. "Who did it?" they demanded.

One of the children protested, "Why do you beat me? I am innocent." The guard said, "What? You are protesting! This must be the guy." He mercilessly beat him. The child kept saying until he fainted, "I didn't do it." The old fox dragged the boy into school and released us all. The boy was beaten for days without meals.

When he came back to school a few days later, he was a different boy. He no longer talked or laughed, and he had bruises all over his body. At the sight of any teacher, he always hid under a desk.

A Child Brutally Beaten for a Minor Offense

Witnessed by CH Kang, former child prisoner of detention settlement



One summer, we were assigned to work in a large vegetable field. We spent more time in the field, planting and transplanting vegetables and removing weeds, than in the classroom. We worked all day long in the scorching heat. It was so stressful that the children often complained about the hard work. One day, a child muttered, "I wish flood would wash away all the vegetables here some day."

A security officer heard this and asked us, "Who said that? Come forward!"

Nobody came forward and all the children continued pulling weeds. In fact, everybody felt the same way at that time.

"All of you come here. I will punish you collectively until the criminal comes forward." No one came forward. "I will show you a lesson," he said as he started to beat us with his stick one by one.

Still nobody came forward. He continued to kick, punch and beat us violently. Finally, one child pointed to another child and said,

"Sir! That's him!" The teacher was pleased. "You should have told me earlier."

He dragged the child away. The child was never seen again. Later, we were told that the child was so severely beaten with such heavy blows to his head that he became permanently crippled and insane.

Children Mercilessly Beaten for Minor Offense

Witnessed by CH Kang, former child prisoner of detention settlement

The fat teacher skipped the morning class and told us to chop firewood



in teams of three. We were extremely hungry around ten o'clock in the morning so we stopped working a little bit to eat wild berries in the hill behind. At the end of the day, the teacher asked us, "Is this all the firewood you have?" When one of us replied, "This should be OK," the teacher kicked him so hard that he was thrown to the floor. The teacher began to beat all of us. "What? This is OK? Who do you think I am," he screamed. He was out of breath with anger.

I was so badly beaten that I slowly crawled to run away. He shouted at me, "Where do you think you are going? Get up and come here! I couldn't get up because of the pain all over my bleeding body. He kept kicking and beating me until I somehow managed to get up. He took us into the classroom and threatened other children that they would be treated like us if they didn't work hard enough.

Then, he took us to the corridor outside and ordered us to get on our hands and knees like a dog and follow him shouting, "I am a dog." When none of us moved, he became furious and spat at us. One of us got his dirty yellowish spittle in his face. The child was embarrassed and said in confusion, "Sir! Why do you do this to us?" The teacher was angered by this reaction and started to beat him so brutally that the child lied down motionless on the floor and showed no response to his continual kicking. I thought the poor child was dead. My friend, blood, bruises and wounds all over, looked so light and small.

I did not realize how much time had passed but the poor boy began to move slowly. "He's alive!" I was so delighted that I felt tears swelling in my eyes. We helped him up and entered the classroom together. It was quite late in the evening but the teacher was still preaching to the children. He swore at us

again and gave us his final verdict, “Hard labor for you for the next three months!” Then, he continued threatening the other children. Around midnight he sent us home.

As the three of us were bleeding and limping out of the classroom, he stopped us and said, “I will not forgive you if any of you should be absent from school tomorrow.” All the other children trembled with fear but couldn’t say anything. Some children gave us sympathetic eyes but did not come near us for fear of punishment.

On my way home, I kept weeping and asked myself, “I am twelve years old and what kind of life am I living here? Is my life really worth living? Isn’t death better than a life here?” That night, my grandmother wept and wept throughout the entire night at my bed side. She quietly protested, “He is only a small child. Why do they treat such small boys like that? Are you really human beings?” The next day, all of us were seriously unfit to go to school but went anyway.

A Child Kicked into a Dung Bucket and Beaten to Death

Witnessed by CH Kang, former child prisoner of detention settlement



One day, a primary school boy murmured something to himself while carrying dung in a bucket. Another child next to him informed the teacher about it. The teacher rushed to the child, beat him and kicked him in the face with his boots when he fell.

“You s.o.b.! Now, you go into this dung pit and clean the bottom with your hands, you got it?” The child was already so badly beaten that he could hardly get up. The teacher kicked the weak child into the temporary and shallow dung pit. The child struggled hard to get out of the pit.

The teacher was furious and kicked him into the dung pit again. The child was trying to get out of it again when the teacher kicked his head hard. By this time, the child was covered with dung and blood all over his body and terribly injured. He could hardly hold himself up but he was given the punishment of carrying dung the rest of that day. He was whipped hard each time he moved slowly or stopped moving. He was told to use his hands to get dung out of the bucket and spread it in the field. The child had worked hard the entire morning and part of the afternoon when he finally fainted with foam in his mouth. The other children trembled with anger at the teacher for his barbaric punishment but could not help the child for fear of punishment and the awful smell of dung on him. The children went home at sunset but the child remained on the ground motionless, lying on the ground until found dead the following morning.

When I went to school the next morning, I heard a loud moaning. I saw the child’s mother holding her dead son and crying. There were a few teachers

and the school principal was also there; none of them showed the slightest regret or remorse. Rather, they were angry.

“You s.o.b! Watch this closely. Remember. This is what’s going to happen to you if you disobey your teachers. Do you understand?” The children, who watched and heard this, trembled with fear and anger.

The school teachers had various ways of punishing children and were extremely cruel. Beating is a standard practice. Other punishments include forcing children to move around the exercise ground on their hands and knees and clean the ground with their hands, making children stand in the sun all day long or making them repeatedly shout, “I am a dog!” Some children became physically or mentally disturbed as a result of the severe beatings and punishments.

Labor of Death for Children

Witnessed by CH Kang, former child prisoner of detention settlement



The children in our 4th grade class were ordered to dig and transport earth to a work site some 200 meters away. Twelve children dug holes with shovels and the other children carried the dirt in zinc buckets or sacks. The site of the digging was a clay hill, 4~5 meters high. The clay was fairly soft so it was not difficult to dig. But we were afraid because the hole, which became deeper as we continued digging, seemed like it could collapse at any time. As we dug away one shovel of dirt, two shovels full of dirt would fall.

After working for two or three days, our hole became two to three meters deep inside. Dirt often fell from the top of the hole. The teachers did not care and told the children to go ahead with the work inside the hole. Then all of a sudden, the hole collapsed. It was so sudden that nobody had time to do anything about it. Six children screamed and disappeared from our sights. There was a huge pile of dirt where the six had been digging. The other children were so shocked that they threw up their shovels and scrambled out of the hole. We trembled with fear. Three children were killed and three other children were badly wounded that day. The children were blamed for carelessness.

We heard the school principal and the teachers shouting at the older children, "The s.o.b.s! Why did you dig at the bottom without knowing what was going to happen?"

After digging down some 50 centimeters, we found three children first. Fortunately they were alive but they were crying out in pain for their mommies

and daddies as they were moved out. Perhaps their legs or arms were broken. When we dug about a meter further, we discovered the figures of the remaining three children. Their faces were full of dirt and blood, their noses and mouths still bleeding. The teacher put his hand over their hearts, examined their eyes and shook his head hopelessly. Teachers covered the bodies with straw mats and allowed nobody to come closer. The girls could not control their sadness at the sight and burst out crying.

“You crazy bitches! Are you crying to bring us bad luck? Stop that!”

The school principal scolded the girls. He swore at the crying children in a booming voice and blamed the dead children for what had happened. He said, “You should have known better than that. You were lazy to dig only the bottom and this is what happened. You s.o.b.s, you see what happens to you if you don’t work hard. You got it?”

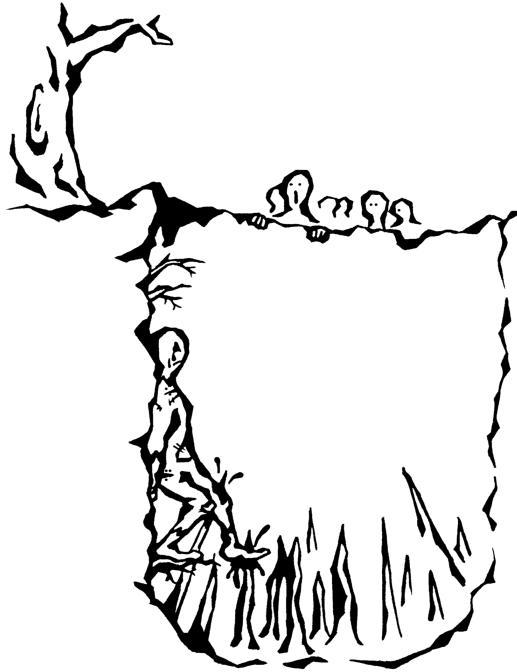
It was near lunchtime and we stopped work and came back to the classroom. The parents of the dead children rushed to school frantically. They cried and pleaded to have a last look at the faces of their poor children but the teachers had already buried the dead children. The teachers argued that allowing the parents to see the corpses would only deepen their pain.

Stains of blood were still vivid when we arrived at the work site after lunch. We were horrified at the sight and everyone tried to be at the end of the line. The teacher in charge of our class looked at us angrily and called out twelve names to form new digging teams.

At the end of the day’s work, we were assembled at the school ground to hear the principal’s long and angry speech. As expected, he blamed the children for the accident. None of us agreed with him and, in fact, all of us trembled inside our hearts with anger at his words. Yes, indeed, we were small children but we were sensible enough to understand why this happened.

A Child Accidentally Falls into a Trap

Witnessed by CH Kang, former child prisoner of detention settlement



One summer day, our task was to collect special mountain herbs for export. As we got deeper into the mountain, one of the boys became frightened and said, "Let's go back. We came too far." Another boy replied, "No, we have a few hours before sunset. Let's move further." We were moving further away from our school. Suddenly, a child fell down the slope and disappeared from our sight. We heard his screaming, "Help!" When we reached the bottom, we saw barbed wire and a tall watch tower at some distance. We came to the end of the settlement and there was a trap! The child fell into the trap but luckily a tree root held him up halfway. He was hanging just above the sharp spikes at the bottom. But some spikes pierced through one of his legs. We heard a lot about the horrible security devices around the detention settlement but this was the first time we actually saw one.

We were so frightened that we threw away all the herbs we had collected that day and ran away from the spot with the wounded boy on our backs.

Two Child Prisoners Killed by Guard Dogs

Witnessed by MC Ahn, former guard of detention settlements



In May 1988, two 13 year-old girls named Okhwa & Sunshil of Unit 19, Tongpo Sector, Settlement No. 13, were mauled to death by guard dogs on their way home from settlement school. Five prisoners, including two women, saw the dead girls and were executed to keep it a secret from the other prisoners. We were instructed not to tell anybody about it. No one was held responsible for their deaths.

Another incident:

Two female prisoners were devoured by guard dogs in Settlement No. 22 in the summer of 1991.

We were taking a rest from training when we heard some children screaming, "Help! Help!" from the prisoners' path some 100 meters away. We heard the voices but couldn't see anybody. A little later, we heard two female prisoners screaming, "Dogs eating children! Help!" We decided to go and check it out when we heard two pistol shots.

When we arrived there, we saw five prisoners and Major Kim, a security officer, with a pistol in his hand. There were two girls bleeding on the ground in appalling shape. One of the two women already fainted and the other woman was moaning, "Oh, poor Ok-hwa and Sun-shil!" My commanding officer asked the security officer what happened. He ignored him and shouted at the prisoners, "You s.o.b.s, stop crying or I will make that happen to your children

and I'll crush your eyes!"

He ordered two of the prisoners to bring a cart. Then, he turned to us with an angry face and yelled, "Comrades, you should have watched your dogs more closely. Look what happened yourself." He walked away to the work sites.

The next morning, we were assembled at the conference hall.

"Yes, we told you not to treat prisoners as human beings and not to have any mercy on them. However, it is a very serious matter that poor control over guard dogs resulted in the deaths of two small girls yesterday. If you were the only witnesses, it would not have been that serious. But there were five other prisoners. Imagine what would have happened if the prisoners told everybody in the settlement about it. They could have revolted or if someone escapes, he may tell the world about what happened here. Luckily, we took care of the five prisoners in time. The issue will be under control if you all keep your mouths shut!"

In the summer of 1991, two female prisoners working up in the mountain to collect nuts were missing. The security officers thought that they could have been lost in the mountain, but the guards were alerted for the night. Nothing happened during the night.

The following morning, dog-training guards found the five village dogs that they had been training with blood on their mouths. They hoped that the dogs caught a wild boar and followed the dogs to the mountain hoping to find some wild beasts. They were surprised to find there the two women who had been missing the previous day, but only bones and skulls remained, when they arrived with the dogs.

The settlement authorities buried the skulls and bones, leaving no sign of them and announced that the two missing women committed suicide at the reservoir.

Chapter VIII

Executions, Murders and Deaths

All the witness accounts claim that torture, executions (secret, arbitrary, or public), murders, and deaths are commonplace events in the North Korean detention settlements and political prisons. As observed in the previous chapters, the disregard for the lives of the prisoners makes it likely that prisoners are murdered or executed for arbitrary reasons.

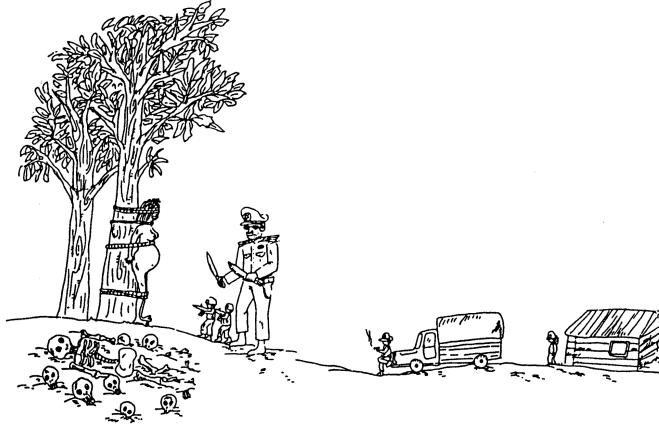
1. Execution

a. Secret Executions

One of the former guards offers us convincing testimonies about widespread secret executions. In addition, the former child prisoner's accounts include the chance discovery of many corpses of victims of secret executions. The former female prisoner also testifies to secret execution.

Secret Execution (I)

Report by Mr. MC Ahn, former guard of detention settlements



In March 1991, we began our first day of marching at Detention Settlement No.22. By nightfall, we were exhausted and decided to camp at Sugol Valley. We were instructed to cook rice without kettles for training the next morning. Cooking rice without kettles requires digging ground and collecting stones, dry leaves and firewood. I was digging into the ground some 50-centimeters deep when I hit something hard and soon unearthed an object that looked like a broken piece of wood. Somebody behind me shouted, "Look! It's a corpse." I looked at it carefully and found it was a human leg. Then, others here and there shouted, "It's a grave yard here!" Soon, the other guards found recently buried corpses. The officers examined the corpses and ordered us to bury them. The guards who were collecting stones and dry leaves ran down from the hill and exclaimed, "Wow! Skulls!" We marched to another hill near the investigation corps. We all hoped that we would never see that appalling sight again, not even in our dreams.

When I was transferred to Settlement No. 22 from Settlement No. 13 in February 1990, I found out that, just like in Settlement No. 13, there was a secret killing field in Settlement No. 22, Sugol valley, Samsok District. Killing prisoners in secrecy is a standard practice at North Korean detention settlements. There are also public executions to serve the purpose of warning all prisoners. Prisoners who maintain improper relationships with security personnel, such as sexual relations, are murdered cruelly in secrecy.

Sugol Valley was a dreadful place infested with crows and wild beasts such as boars, wolves and foxes. The Sugol Criminal Investigation Corps, staffed with senior security officers, was in charge of guarding the valley. Accidentally, this area was also used by guard units for marching and camping for 3 days and 2 nights each year.

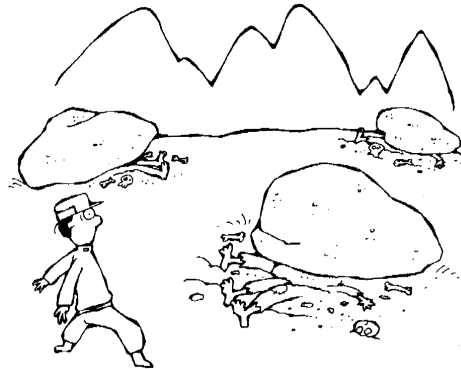
Once, the State Security Minister, Byong-do Kim, had a villa in one of the detention settlements. He picked up the prettiest girls to sleep with and then sent them to the 3rd bureau for human biological testing.

The following incident, which occurred in the seventies, is common knowledge among security officers and guards and often quoted in ideology sessions:

“In the seventies, when a large number of security officers were involved in scandals with girls in the detention settlements and punished as a result, Minister Kim ordered all the prison settlements to kill all pretty female prisoners, girls in particular, to avoid any further similar scandals. As a result, 250 pretty female prisoners were massacred in Life Detention Settlement No. 13 at that time.”

Secret Execution II – Killing Field

Witnessed by Mr. MC Ahn, former guard of detention settlements



In 1989, when we reached the summit of Onsok Height, a secret killing field in Settlement No. 13, we found the rocks we needed and started to move them. When I picked up the fifth rock, I noticed a piece of cloth. I didn't give it a second thought. Then, I noticed wet human hair attached to the bottom of the rock. When I moved the rock, I saw a human corpse, wet and covered with worms. The skull was crushed beyond recognition. The presence of long hair indicated that it was a woman. The rock was wet at the bottom from the decaying corpse and a revolting smell filled the air. I looked around at the other stones and found most of them wet at the bottom. I was going to shout for help when I heard other guards shouting and running, "There are human corpses here!" We all ran away and stumbled on the way down. It was so disgusting that I felt like vomiting.

The officers at the bottom of the hill slapped some of us, saying, "You weaklings, such cowardice! You are supposed to be soldiers. Go back up there and roll down the rocks." We all pleaded, "Sir, there are human skulls up there! We can't go there!" The officers compromised, "All right, pick up some of these stones around here and let's go back." This was the first time I had seen rotten corpses in my life and I never went up there again. When I went on my routine patrol near the area, I felt my heart beating with fear and I tried to turn my face away from the hill.

There was a place called Onsok Height some 500 meters from my duty post at Detention Settlement No. 13. The height was wet and sometimes there was a bad smell in the air in springtime. There were many stones on the height. All of us knew that there was a secret killing field and about the rumor of ghosts up there.

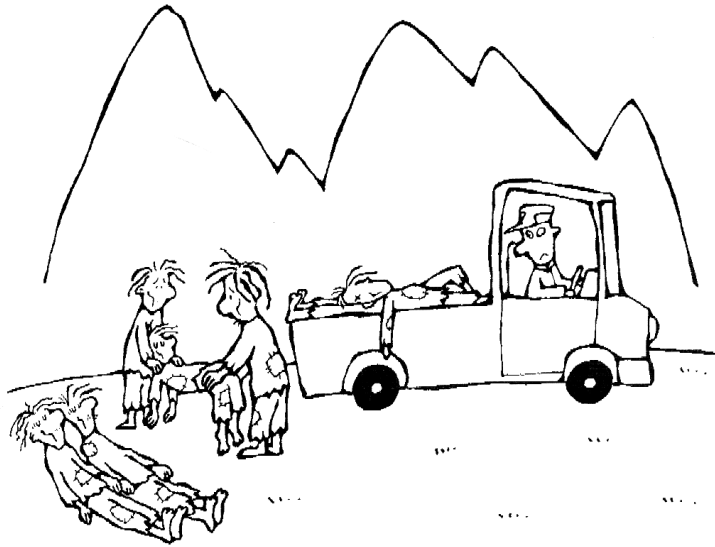
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No one wanted to go up the hill. Once we were told to bring big stones from the height for the construction of a bulletproof wall around our headquarters. The officers were obviously afraid and stayed at the foot and made us go up there. There was a drive way up to the summit. We chased away crows as we walked up. My feet were trembling with fear. We loudly laughed and talked to each other to overcome the fear. The height was surrounded with barbed wire walls and was off limit to prisoners. When we reached the top, it was flat with a few stones and little holes here and there. At first, we thought there was nothing to fear, but as soon as we tried to collect big rocks, we started to discover so many corpses.

When we returned to our barracks, we all agreed that the rumor about the secret executions was true.

Secret Execution III – Killing Field

Witnessed by Mr. MC Ahn, former guard of detention settlements



Onsok Height was the secret execution site for Detention Settlement No.13 and many corpses were found when we we reached for rocks to be used for the construction of guard posts. In the autumn of 1989, security officers went to the killing field with ten political prisoners and a truck to remove corpses from the height. The prisoners were under punishment and were selected for execution after the excavation.

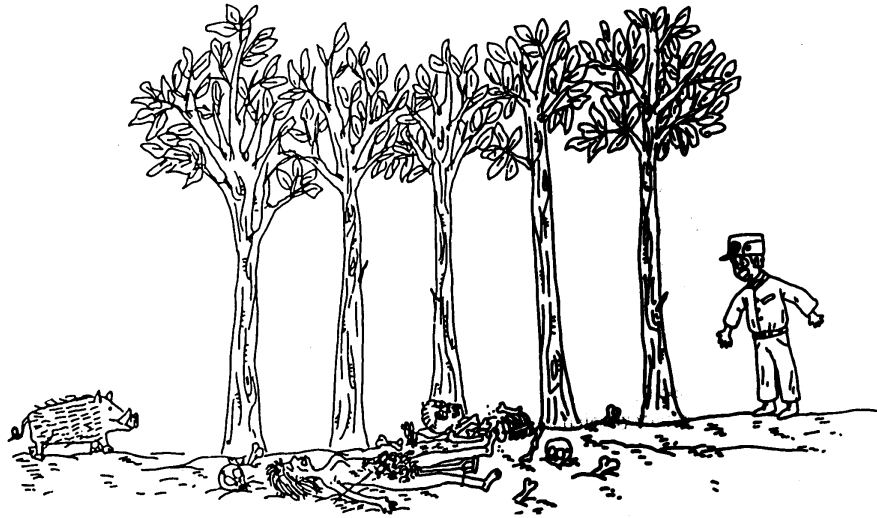
It was already very cold and therefore not easy to dig up the corpses from the frozen ground. The poorly dressed prisoners, hungry and shivering, dug up the corpses from the frozen ground and loaded them onto the truck. They looked at each other secretly as they worked. The work continued three days. A full truckload of corpses was carried off to another location each day.

Later, we were told by our platoon commanding officer that the corpses were cremated and the prisoners who dug them up were all executed to maintain secrecy.

Today, nobody will find anything strange on Onsok Height when they collect rocks there. The new guards will know nothing about the area and the prisoners working there to collect stones will have no idea that so many of their fellow prisoners were brutally killed there.

A Female Prisoner's Corpse – Secret Execution

Experienced by Mr. MC Ahn, former guard of detention settlements



In March 1992, we were camping in Sugol Valley in Settlement No. 22. One day, after lunch, I left my tent and went up the hill for evacuation. When I settled down at a corner, I noticed a shovel partly covered by dry leaves. I wondered who could have left a shovel in such a remote and deserted place like this.

Thinking that I could use it for my camping, I tried to pick it up after evacuation. It didn't move. When I kicked away the dry leaves to have a better look, I found a naked young girl's corpse! The corpse was covered with worms and the shovel was deep inside her body. I ran away in horror. Then, I found another corpse, beheaded and without arms. I was so shocked and confused that I just kept running aimlessly. Soon I became lost and couldn't find my camping site. It was so quiet that I could only hear the sound of the wind.

A little while later, I heard some movement in the distance and saw three wild boars running away. I was frightened, but curious to see where the wild boars had been. Again, there was a human corpse and the beasts had been eating it! It was a man's corpse, still fresh with no flesh on one of the thighs. One of the arms was torn away from the shoulders. I shouted for help but there was no response. After calming down, I went up a nearby peak and saw smoke coming from our camping sites far below. I had gone so far in the

opposite direction!

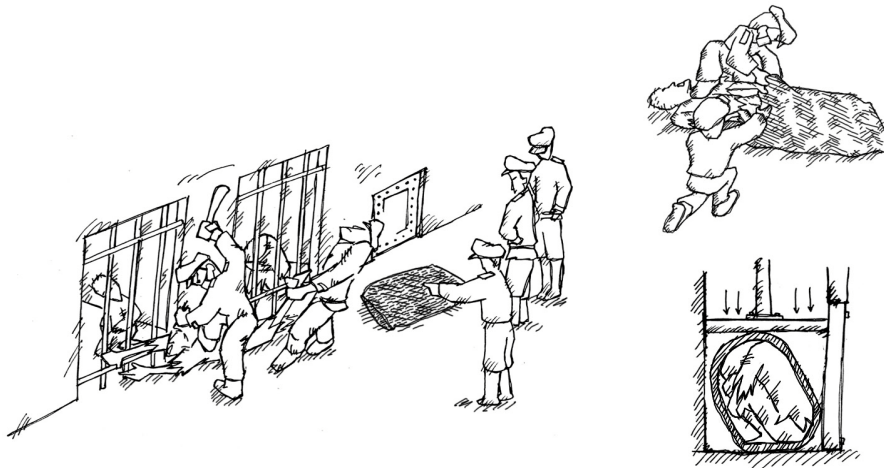
In March 1992, we marched and camped at a location some 500 meters away from the location where we found a large number of human corpses the previous year. Obviously, the officers concluded that the site they selected this year was safe.

The area was quite steep with a lot of stones and dry leaves. A good number of crows were hovering above us. When we reached our camp, I felt exhausted and sat down. My colleagues asked me, “Myong-chol, what happened?” I replied, “You guys better look around carefully. I was once lost in the grave yard up there.” They replied, “Not here. It was in the other valley where we camped last year.” They wished they wouldn’t see anything like last year again, not even in their dreams.

Just at that moment, a young guard, only 17 years old, ran down from a hill crying with his pants still halfway down his legs, “Sir, somebody died there!” He was scolded by officers for being a weakling. Then, there was an order to dismantle the tents for retreat. As we left the place, I swore to myself time and time again that I would never come back here again.

Prisoners Killed in Temperature-regulated Compression Chamber

Witnessed by Sun-ok Lee, former prisoner of a political prison



There are executioners in the Interrogation Department of the Provincial Security Headquarters. Here, they execute the prisoners that they are embarrassed to execute publicly. They always execute prisoners at midnight without trial and bury the corpses in a nearby valley.

There is also a temperature-regulated compression chamber used for torturing or killing. The chamber is 60 square centimeters and the height is adjustable according to the prisoner's height. A prisoner is pushed into a rice straw bag first, and then into the chamber with his head pushed down between his knees. These acts usually occur between one and two o'clock in the morning. Freezing temperatures are used in the winter and hot temperatures in the summer.

A 17 year-old boy, the son of a welder in Kimchaek Steel Factory, was brought here sometime in October 1987. He was arrested for organizing gang fighting in school. Gang fighting is considered a very serious crime leading to subversion in North Korea. He was killed in the chamber by freezing at midnight. I heard this from Yong-ho, a guard, who proudly told us, "You bitches better obey unless you want to be killed like the boy, frozen and

compressed.” In fact, other guards repeated similar threats.

A young man became lunatic as a result of continuing torture. He complained one day, “Great Leader?³ What has he done for me?” He was frozen to death in the chamber that night.

The chamber was next to my cell at the end of the corridor. The cries of a prisoner resisting and angry voices of guards trying to push him into a rice straw bag and into the chamber always woke me up. I always found executioners in uniform and with a star on their shoulders on such occasions. During the 14 months I was there, I remember five or six killings in the chamber.

³ This is the normal way in which North Koreans refer to former president (now deceased) Kim Il Sung.

b. Public Executions

Four of the five witnesses testify to the widespread practice of public executions.

Prisoners are publicly executed everywhere in North Korea, both inside and outside of detention settlements and political prisons. To date, each and every North Korean defector that the researchers have come across in South Korea, has claimed to have witnessed public executions while in North Korea. The purpose of these executions seems to be to intimidate the population. Although it is understood that more serious offenders are executed by public hanging, shooting appears to be more common for public execution. There is also one report of execution by burning but there are no reliable witnesses.

As a standard practice, the prisoners are always gagged before execution so that they cannot protest in front of the public. In all cases, the prisoners are badly beaten, to the brink of death, so that they cannot resist in public. Victims are often blindfolded.

A Prisoner Stoned to Death

Report by MC Ahn, former guard of detention settlements



In 1984, a 27-year-old political prisoner working as a mechanic at the transportation unit, Tongpo Sector, Settlement No. 13, stole a guard jeep (plate No. 580131) and succeeded in fleeing to China, leaving the jeep by the riverside. However, he was arrested and repatriated back to North Korea by the Chinese authorities. The settlement supervisor was furious, saying that the incident was a personal insult against Kim Il Sung, the Great Leader.

The prisoner had wire pierced through his nose and large nails hammered through his toes and legs. Then, the other prisoners were forced to stone him to death.

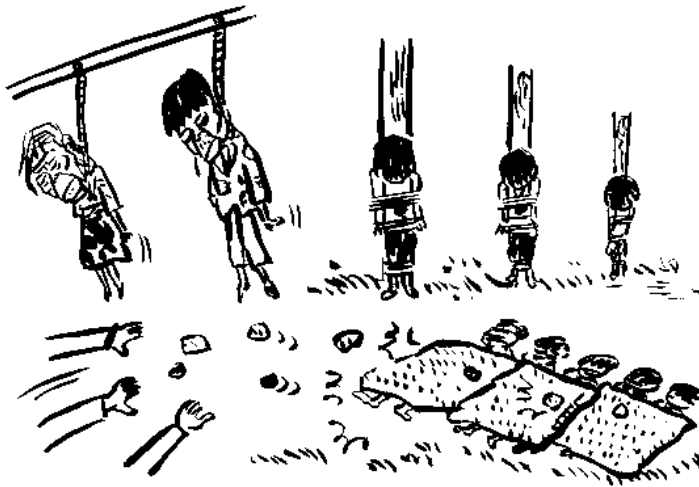
I did not actually witness the execution myself, but it was common knowledge in the settlement because the commanding officers often reminded the prisoners of this execution as a warning. I watched similar public executions when I was student, twice in Hamhung city and once in Chongjin city.

Public Execution of a Whole Family

Report by Mr. DC Choi, former detention settlement guard

In July 1985, a family of five attempted to escape the country and were caught in the mountains within the settlement after three days. The family consisted of a grandmother, her son and three grandchildren. All prisoners were assembled by the riverside and surrounded by armed guards. Machine guns were mounted at four corners. Then, the grandmother and her son were hung while the three children, all under ten, were shot. Their corpses were laid down and covered with straw mats. All the prisoners were instructed to view them as they passed by. Then, one of the prisoners threw a stone at one of the corpses. Soon, all the other prisoners began throwing stones. It was so awful and appalling. All the prisoners feared punishment for not doing so.

No prisoners leave the settlement, dead or alive. There are so many deaths resulting from beatings, hunger, accident, disease or public executions. I have no idea what happens to their corpses. I was only a guard and the security officers were the ones who administered and operated the settlement. I have never seen any graves in the settlement.



Public execution is very common in North Korea. Obviously, it serves the purpose of intimidating the population. I watched a public execution once before joining the army, once in Detention Settlement No. 11, and the last one in November, 1992, at the cigarette farm where I worked until I defected after

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my dismissal from the service.

As a middle school boy, I went to Chongjin City in North Korea for a festival with a friend of mine. We saw a public notice for a public execution. It was a very cold winter day. Some 3,000 factory workers were assembled at the Susong riverside. A young man was shot on the charge of sabotage for attempting to damage a furnace at a steel factory. His face was covered with a piece of black cloth.

The last one was in November 1992, at the cigarette farm. A teenage worker was shot for killing a soldier.

A Boy's Account of a Public Execution at a Detention Settlement

Reported by CH Kang, former child prisoner of detention settlement



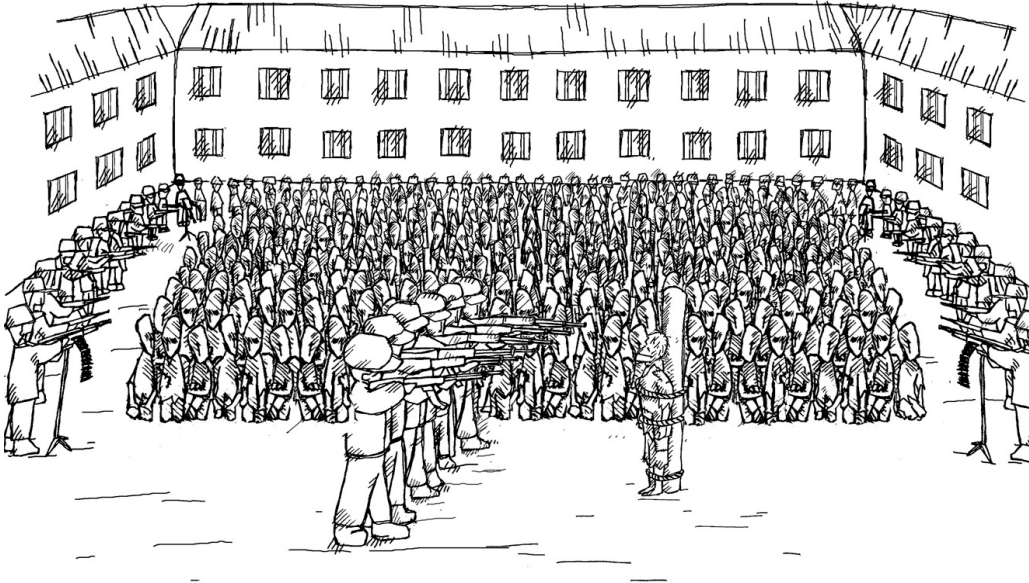
One day, the school was closed without any explanation. My sister and I were so delighted, and we slept the whole morning. When we woke up around three o'clock in the afternoon, I remembered hearing about three defectors. When my father and uncle returned home that night, I asked them what happened to the defectors. They said nothing.

The next day, one of the boys from school told us about what he saw at the riverside the previous day:

"There were several thousand people at the riverside. The settlement superintendent read something and then the security officers dragged three men, who could not sustain themselves and were almost dead, and tied them around three poles. They were all gagged and could not say anything. There were nine snipers, three snipers for each prisoner. Then, there was an order, "Fire!" and "bang, bang, bang." They shot at them three times. The executioner kicked the bodies to confirm that they were dead, rolled them up with straw mats and loaded them onto a truck that sped away. All my friends listening to him were so frightened and I was so shocked." The boy continued, "They say the snipers are so good that three of them hit the same spot making the bullet hole large. Which would be more painful, to be hit in the head or breast?"

Public Execution in Prison

Witnessed by Sun-ok Lee, former prisoner of a political prison



Public executions are standard practice in and outside prisons in North Korea. In 1988, seven men and one woman were publicly executed in the Kaechon prison without trial. At each public execution, all the prisoners, some six thousand (1,800~2,000 women and 4,000 men), are crammed into the prison square to watch.

The victims are always gagged so they cannot protest. They are tied to a pole in three parts; chest, sides and knees. Six guards fire three bullets each into the chest for a total of 18 bullets. With the top ropes having been cut by the bullets, the upper part of the body hangs down bleeding, like a rotten log broken in half, still tied to the pole by the lower ropes. Then, all the prisoners are forced to march around the dead body and look at it.

Prisoners Go Insane from Watching Public Executions



Execution victims included those who pleaded for death during torture, stole food, or simply wept over the fate of two small children left home alone. The charge was lack of confidence in the mother party. Also included are those who are branded as “anti-party elements” or “reactionaries.”

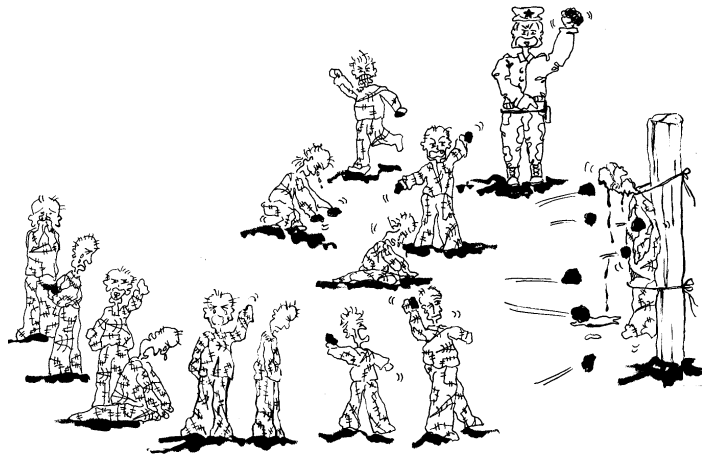
The public execution ground is so crammed with prisoners that the women in the front watch the killing from a distance of only a meter or so and often get blood splashed on them. Some women prisoners are so shocked that they vomit, faint, or develop mental illness (e.g., sudden singing or laughing hysterically). They are sent to punishment cells for being “weak in ideology” and “showing sympathy to the people’s enemy.” Those who become completely insane simply disappear and nobody knows what happens to them.

Hi-suk Choi and Young-ok Choi, housewives from Kimchaek City, were punished for singing at the site and later died of shock during electric torture. The Kaechon Prison has twenty punishment cells that are always full of “ideologically weak” prisoners on the days of public executions.

Prisoners Forced to Throw Stones at the Dead Bodies of Those Who Have Been Executed

Witnessed by Mr. Hyok Ahn, former detention settlement prisoner

When I had just recovered from the shock of witnessing a public execution, I heard a security officer instructing us, "All of you must pass the corpse and return to your work, starting with Bachelors' Unit No. 1! Each one of you must pick up a stone and throw it at the reactionary as you pass by." The first group hesitated for a moment. "Unless you want to be treated like the reactionaries, you'd better throw stones at them!" barked the executioner. Then, one of the prisoners threw a stone. Surprisingly, everybody else followed suit. The strong desire for survival had overcome their humanity. Some of the prisoners intentionally went near the security officers and threw stones at the corpse saying, "Down with the traitor!" in an effort to please the officers.

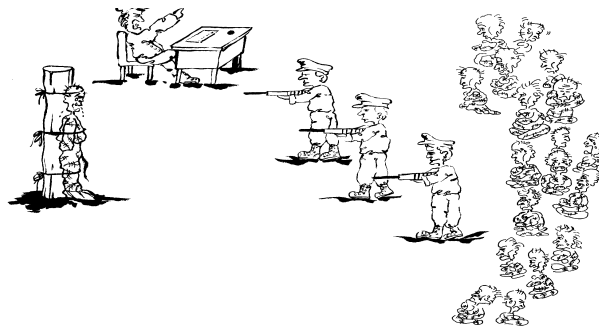


The skin of the bleeding face and body was badly torn and white bone could be seen in some places. Many women and girls from Japan fainted with foam in their mouths. A woman repatriated from Japan named Sung Shin-hi turned her face away from the corpse as she passed by and did not throw a stone. The security officer kicked her down and smashed her face with his boots. She screamed and her face was badly bleeding. Prisoners continued as if nothing ever happened.

Public Execution at a Detention Settlement

Witnessed by Mr. Hyok Ahn, former detention settlement prisoner

Three soldiers were lined up with rifles ready to shoot. The condemned man, his head, hands, and legs hanging, was gagged and dragged to the execution site by security officers because he could not walk by himself. Suddenly, the victim summoned surprising strength, raised his head straight and spat out the gag from his mouth, and began to shout loudly, “Ladies and Gentlemen, I am innocent. The security officers, worse than dogs and pigs, wanted to kill me and they...” One of the security officers picked up a stone and smashed the victim’s mouth. Blood poured from his mouth, many of his teeth having been broken. His face was full of blood and he fainted. The officers blindfolded him and then tied him up against a pole in three places, the neck, breast and legs. The executioner shouted, “Fire!”



The first shot broke the rope around his neck, making his head fall forward. The second shot pierced the rope around his chest, causing blood to spray from his breast and his body to drop to an inverted “L” shape. When the last shot broke the rope around his legs, he fell to the ground like a log. Blood ran from his body, but not much. An officer approached the dead body and shot at the head with his pistol to ensure his death. His body was rolled up in a dirty old straw mat and thrown onto a truck, which soon disappeared to an unknown location.

I thought I would be strong enough to take the shock but suddenly, I felt so weak that it was difficult to sustain myself. A prisoner next to me, a newcomer, fainted at the sight.

There are usually more than ten cases of disobedience or unsuccessful attempts for defection by prisoners each year. The unsuccessful defectors are always executed publicly by shooting, but sometimes by hanging. The

prisoners witness and hear about so many deaths and are so familiar with deaths in the settlement that they are usually indifferent to it. Nevertheless, they are shocked by public executions because the cruelty is beyond imagination. The victims include unsuccessful defectors and those who resist the security officers because of degrading treatment. The public executions usually take place in the presence of all the adult prisoners at riverside around ten o'clock in the morning.

One day, a public execution was announced for an unsuccessful defector. All the prisoners over the age of 16 were instructed to watch. The settlement is so large that it took us many hours to arrive at the site of execution. When we arrived at the riverside, the place was already full of prisoners from other villages. Newcomers whispered about the victim but the old timers showed no interest. We had been there quite some time when suddenly two jeeps pulled in causing dust. The security officers descended from the first car. The prisoner emerged from the second car, skin and bone, and so badly beaten that he was barely recognizable. Two guards were needed to bring him from the car.

The settlement supervisor went up to the platform and began to read a sentence:

“This guy here, name and date of birth and so on, was badly contaminated by corrupt capitalist ideology as a student and began to spread anti-state words. Nevertheless, the party was generous and decided to forgive him through ideological reeducation. This ungrateful beast, however, betrayed the generosity of the party, rejected the helping hands extended to him and attempted to defect. When the party opened up its bosom to embrace him, he rejected it. How can he be forgiven? He deserves death, nothing else!...”

He was then bound and shot.

Public Execution by Hanging

Witnessed by CH Kang, former child prisoner of detention settlement



One day in August 1985, we were instructed to stop work and assemble at the riverside. We were all surprised when we arrived there. "Look! Gallows. Are they executing the two heroes today?" There were already several thousand prisoners there from the other villages. For many of them, it was their first time to watch death by hanging.

Soon, two trucks arrived. The superintendent and several security officers descended from the first truck and two condemned convicts from the second one. It was a sunny day. The convicts could not even walk and looked miserable with blood and wounds on their faces. They looked more like beasts than men. The security officers had to drag the bloody convicts. I felt like crying for them. I never saw them before but I felt like they were my brothers. Armed guards surrounded us all.

The final verdicts were read. It was so quiet that we could hear the stream running. The two victims had their heads covered with cloth under the gallows. All the prisoners were quiet. When the curtain was removed, we saw two men hanging, like dogs, their faces turned black. One of them was still slightly moving and we could see urine dripping from him. I fainted at that sight. Minutes later, I regained consciousness and heard a loud voice. "All of you must pass the corpses and throw stones at them as you leave."

In August 1985, two former North Korean People's Army soldiers escaped from the settlement. They had been specially trained commando troops operating along the front line with South Korea. They had been arrested for singing South Korean songs and talking about South Korea and were detained

here a short time ago.

They were both single and young and did not have any family in the settlement to worry about like others. They could not take the degrading treatment in the settlement and decided to run away. When they fled, thousands of prisoners were mobilized to search for them in the hills and mountains. We had sharp sticks to push into the ground inch by inch to detect underground hiding.

“Remember, none of you can go home until you find them,” the security officers shouted angrily. Nobody imagined that they could have ever escaped from the settlement because it was so heavily guarded with tall and electrified barbed wire walls and all kinds of security arrangements and traps here and there.

We searched for them for a week in vain. Two weeks passed and we were all so tired. Some prisoners said, “Can you believe that they could have escaped from the settlement?” Others replied, “Otherwise, how come we could not find any trace of them in the mountains and hills here?”

The settlement authorities finally concluded that they escaped from the settlement and extended the search nationwide. Only then, could we return home for the first time after 15 days. We all had a relatively easy time because the security officers and guards were so busy trying to catch them. All the prisoners were at liberty to guess what happened and so we talked about the heroes.

After 20 days, one of the escapees was arrested in another province and ten days later, the second man was also arrested. They had planned to defect to China. When they got out of the settlement, they decided to separate to avoid attention. One of them wandered in the mountains and got lost until he was arrested. The second man, however, successfully crossed the border and entered China. Unfortunately, he was arrested in China and repatriated to North Korea by the Chinese authorities.

c. Arbitrary Executions

All the witnesses testify to the practice of arbitrary executions in one way or another. The prisoners who are murdered are buried without formal ceremonies or any grave markings.

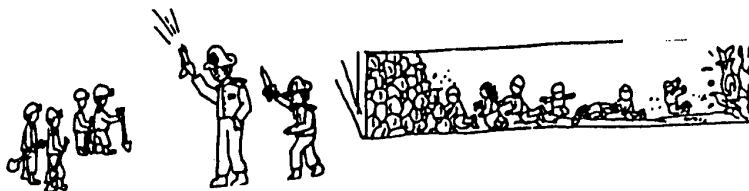
The traditional graves in Korea are constructed as little domes above the ground to show that they are tombs. However, murdered prisoners are buried in the ground without any markings to cover up the killings. This is why one of the former guards, who did not stay in the settlement long enough, remembered the large number of killings in the detention settlement but did not see any tombs.

Prisoners Abandoned in a Collapsing Mine

Witnessed by Mr. MC Ahn, former guard of detention settlements



Prisoners who work in the mines in the life imprisonment settlements often die from all sorts of accidents. The facilities and tools are primitive and there are few safety provisions for the prisoners. The mines' gangways are usually so narrow that the prisoners are often forced to lie on their backs to dig coal. Men and women work in equal numbers in the mines.



In May 1993, there was a fire in the gangway of a mine at Settlement No. 22. The security officers blasted the gangway entrance with dynamite to contain the fire. Some 50 prisoners were abandoned inside and left to die.

In the mines, work continues for 24 hours in three shifts. The ventilation in the gangway and safety control are so poor that many prisoners die or are injured every day. Because the prisoners are too short for the trolleys, they have to climb up the trolley to dump the coal inside. Oftentimes, they are so weak that they fall into the trolleys with the coal and get killed. The mines are in such fragile condition that it is like a time bomb waiting to explode at any minute. Still, several thousands of prisoners are forced to enter into the gangway not knowing when it may collapse or explode. Every day,

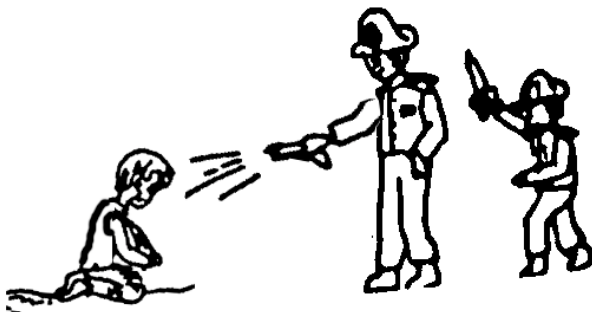
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prisoners are killed by fires or security officers.

An average of 40,000 tons of coal are produced by the prisoners each year. The coal is then used to generate power for electrifying the settlement fences and producing bullets. When I was on duty at Settlements No. 13 and No. 22, several hundred prisoners died from mine collapses each year. If there was a fire in the gangway, the security officers would immediately blast the gangway entry to prevent the fire from spreading, with no regard for the human lives inside.

A Prisoner Killed for Trying to Save the Lives of Other Prisoners

Witnessed by Mr. MC Ahn, former guard of detention settlements



In May 1993, I went to Gallery No. 1 of the mine sector to get the coal supply for my guard unit. When I was reversing my truck to load coal, the clerk ran to me and said, "Sir, there is a fire at Gallery No. 1 today and so I'm afraid you have to wait." I left my truck and walked toward gallery No. 1. I heard two explosions on the way and saw the gallery entrance blocked by explosion. Two security officers, Major Song-il Kim and Colonel Su-chol Lee, were there. Some fifty prisoners, who narrowly escaped the gallery fire, were out there trembling.

One of the prisoners in his thirties approached the security officers and said, "Sir, there is a good number of people inside. Please save their lives."

The security officer was very angry and shouted at him, "Shut up, you big mouth!" The prisoner did not stop pleading and the other prisoners also joined him.

"Hey, you! Are you protesting?" The security officer produced a pistol and shot at the man's head. He dropped dead instantly, bleeding from his head. The security officer said, "Who's next? Who is going to resist? Come forward!" He shot three more bullets in the air. The prisoners were all frightened and said nothing. Then, the officers shouted at them, "Back to work!"

I was so frightened at the sight that I felt my feet trembling and came back to my post without coal that day. When I went back there for coal the next day, I was told that some fifty prisoners died inside the gallery the previous day. They buried them in a big hole. No mourning, no funeral and no identification! Soon, grass will grow on the burial site and there will be no sign of the massacred prisoners.

Beating a Japanese Wife to Death

Witnessed by Mr. MC Ahn, former guard of detention settlements

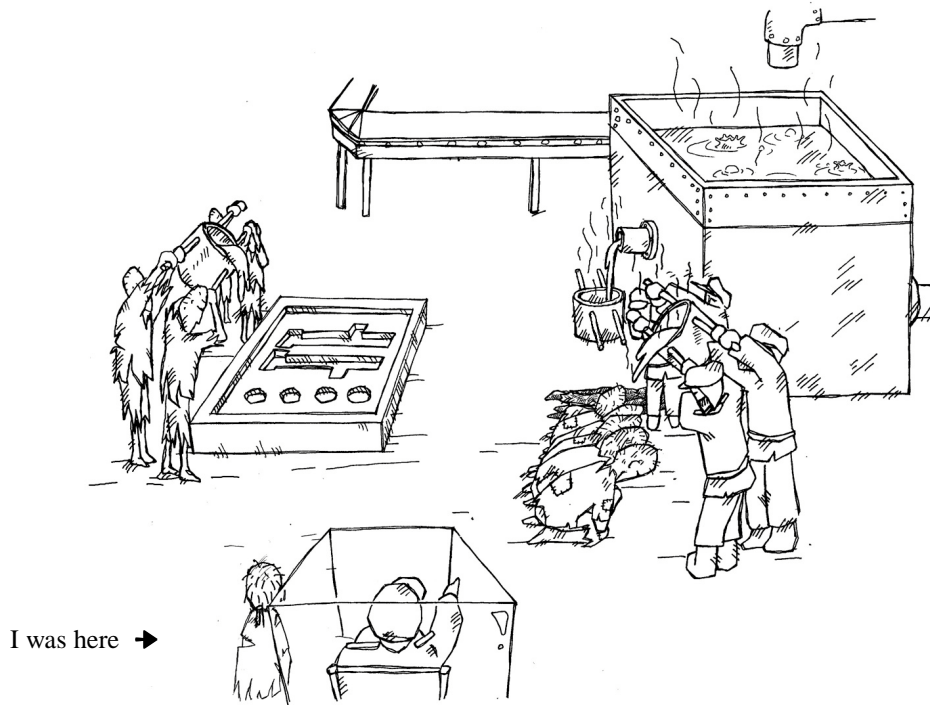


I always hated to be posted at the ammunition store at Detention Settlement No. 22. It was so close to the jail that I could occasionally hear beatings and yelling clearly. One evening in the summer of 1990, for example, I could hear a Japanese wife, about fifty years old, protesting, "I had a good life in Japan and I was never discriminated against there. We only came to North Korea because President Kim Il Sung asked us to come. Is this the paradise he talked about? How can you treat me like this only because I am a Japanese wife?" Her Korean was good and she was making her points very clear to officer Kyong-chol Lee, in between the beatings and screaming that continued for about an hour. I could hear the sound of water splashing.

With her last bit of strength, she protested again, "Woe is me! Why did I follow my husband to North Korea with the children? I thought North Korea would be my second home. Why do we have to be spies? I only thought that my relatives in Japan would lead a good life without knowing about the awful life we live here. Hey, you dog, send our family back to Japan! If you can't send us to Japan, kill us all. I can't live like this in North Korea any more. Send us back to Japan..." I heard a heavy sound just before she finished speaking and an iron stick falling to the cement floor. I never heard her voice again.

Christians Killed for Refusing to Convert

Witnessed by Sun-ok Lee, former prisoner of a political prison

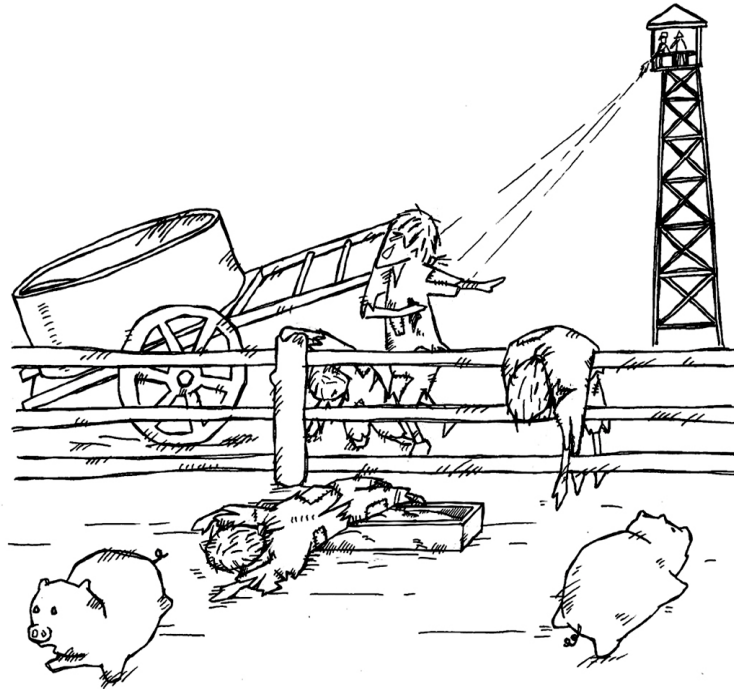


The cast-iron factory was considered the most difficult place to work in the entire prison. Christians were usually sent there to work. One Christian working at the cast-iron factory was killed by hanging in a public execution in December 1988 for hiding a friend at his house before he was arrested.

In the spring of 1990, I was carrying a work order to the cast-iron factory in the male prison. Five or six elderly Christians were lined up and forced to deny their Christianity and accept the Juche Ideology of the State. The selected prisoners all remained silent at the repeated command for conversion. The security officers became furious by this and killed them by pouring molten iron on them one by one.

Prisoners Killed for Eating Pig Slops

Witnessed by Sun-ok Lee, former prisoner of a political prison



There is no wasted food in the prison kitchen. The kitchen prisoners always give the leftover food from outside to the pigs. So, the pigs are always well-fed and fat for the security officers. The prisoners envy the pigs for the good food and leisure. The dung carrying team is also responsible for cleaning the pigsty. The prisoners carrying dung are always so hungry that many of them risk their lives to steal the pig slops as they pass by. When caught eating the pigs' feed, they are shot and killed.

The prisoners on the dung-carrying team look forward to cleaning the pigsty because they can eat the leftovers from the slops with their hands still filthy with dung. The prisoners on the pig-raising team supply pig slops when the prisoners come to clean the pigsties so that the cleaning prisoners can enjoy the chance to have a "good meal" with the pigs.

Kum-bok Kim was from Kanggye town, Jagang Province. She was pretty

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and a very kind-hearted woman. Once, she was caught giving the pigs their feed when other prisoners were cleaning the pens so that prisoners might have a chance to eat pig slops. She was badly beaten by a prison official and kicked until she fainted. She was forced to confess her crime in writing and was sent for further investigation. She died under torture during the investigation.

Female Prisoners Kicked into Sewage Pool

Witnessed by Mr. MC Ahn, former guard of detention settlements



During the summer of 1992, some two hundred prisoners were mobilized from the farm construction unit at Life Detention Settlement No. 22 to reconstruct a laboratory for the guard battalion headquarters. Their task was to connect the drainage to the sewage pool of the kitchen. The pool's depth was about as tall as an ordinary man. Right after lunchtime, two female prisoners found some leftover noodles from the guard kitchen by the edge of the stinking sewage pool. They stretched out, hand in hand, to scoop the noodle pieces. At that moment, a security officer passed by the pool on a bicycle. The two women were so occupied with picking up the noodle pieces that they were not aware of the security officer approaching. They were taken by surprise when the officer kicked them into the sewage pool. The security officer called them "dirty sows" as he sped away on the bicycle. One of the prisoners died shortly after she was rescued by other prisoners.

Four prisoners rushed to the scene and helped pull the two women out. The women smelled awful from the sewage on their bodies. "You should have asked us," said one of the male prisoners sympathetically. "We could have picked up the noodle pieces for you," said another prisoner.

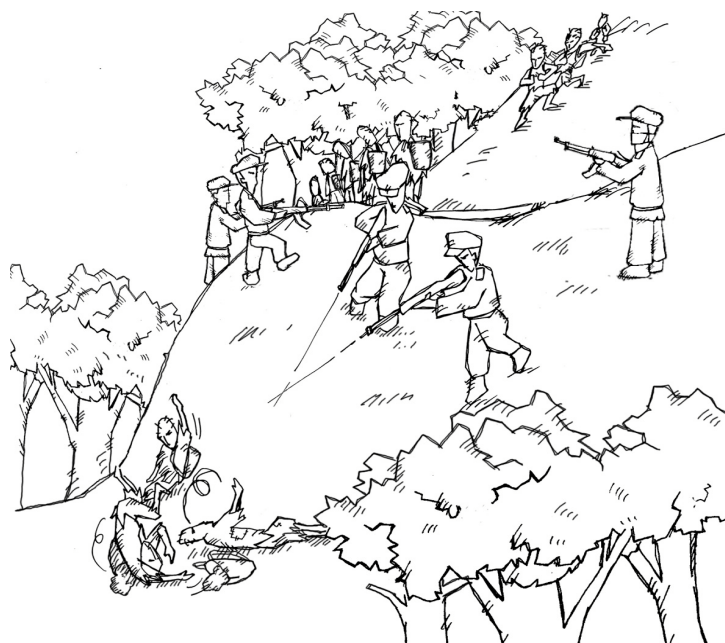
They were kind in their words when they brought buckets of water to

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clean the women. I watched all this happen and found that the prisoners were ordinary kind people just like any other good citizens. I felt strongly that I should try to save them from this hell. I told myself, “Yes, I better get out of here and inform the world of these crimes against prisoners as soon as possible.” One of the two women died shortly after.

Prisoners Shot to Death for Falling on a Steep Slope

Witnessed by Sun-ok Lee, former female prisoner of a political prison



In February, 1988, while carrying a 20 kilogram bag of topsoil from a mountain to the prison farm, an exhausted female prisoner slipped and fell on the slope, causing two other prisoners also to fall from the path. Although they could have been helped up to rejoin the line, they were immediately shot and killed. The prison guards shouted at the rest of the women, "Did you see what happened? This will happen to you if you fall!"

Every February, all the prisoners are mobilized to carry top-soil from Kaechon Mountain to the prison farm. The mountain is outside the prison, 600 meters high, very rugged and slippery when climbing up and down the steep slope.

Each female prisoner must carry a 20-kg bag of topsoil on her back all the way down to the farmland. Prisoners are kicked and beaten for any bag that weighs less than 20 kilograms. 300 prison guards and 350 policemen line up on the path with rifles pointing at the prisoners. The prisoners are ordered

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to make three trips in the morning and three more trips in the afternoon. Climbing up and down a 600-meter mountain six times a day is like torture. The prisoners were warned that if they strayed from the path by even a step they would be shot to death instantly.

Prisoners Killed for Fun

Reported by Mr. DC Choi, former detention settlement guard

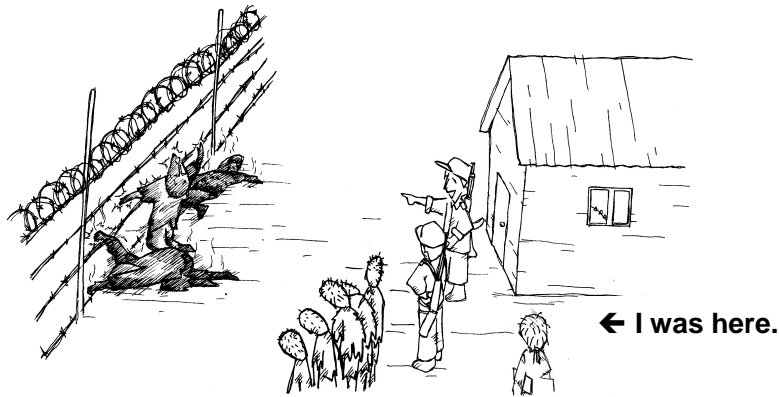
Prisoners are generally forced to do heavy work from 5 o'clock in the morning until midnight at farms, mines or quarries. For any minor offense, they are badly beaten or sent to a punishment cell, where they can hardly expect to survive. Consequently, they are very efficient and productive. However, no prisoners have any share in the products, which are for the state and security officers.



Prisoners are considered readily disposable. Oftentimes, prisoners who work on the farms with axes or sickles are instructed to go to the guards and, when they approach the guards, they are shot to death for fun. The guards always defend their actions by reporting that they killed the prisoners because they rebelled with ax and sickle. The reports are justifiable under the standing instruction to kill prisoners who disobey orders. There were no investigations for any of these incidents.

Guards Killing Prisoners for Fun

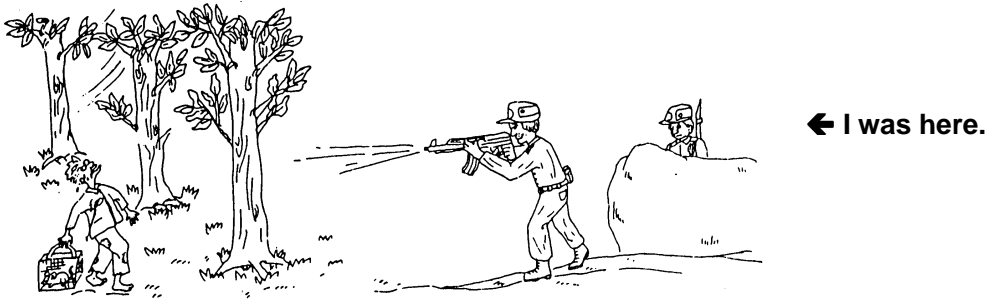
Witnessed by Sun-ok Lee, former prisoner of a political prison -



A couple of times, I saw guards stop a group of male prisoners for fun. "Hey, you and you, come here. If you cross the barbed wire, I will let you go home." With these words, the prison guards tempted prisoners to cross the electrified barbed wire. The prisoners were so desperate and confused that, without hesitation, they jumped to their death by electrocution with the faint hope of going home. This shows how prisoners are considered disposable and easily replaced. This is not an isolated incident. I have heard about it several times and have myself seen it happen twice during the five years I was in prison.

Prisoner Killed to Enhance Performance Report

Witnessed by Mr. MC Ahn, former guard of detention settlements



In the fall of 1988, I was on ambush duty at Salpawi position at Settlement No. 13. At dawn, Sgt. Young-chul Kang, my deputy platoon leader (a son of the chief political officer of Settlement No. 14 (Kaecheon), discovered a political prisoner from the 19th unit, 20th group, Dongpo district, catching rats for food. Sgt. Kang asked no questions and fired some 30 shots with his automatic rifle. He later reported that he had killed a prisoner attempting to escape. As usual, no investigation was made. He was awarded with party membership and sent to Kim Il Sung University in August 1989, a year later.

One day in October 1988, the company commanding officer assembled us together and told us:

“As commanding officer, I herewith express my sincere appreciation to Sgt. Young-chul Kang who discovered and killed an escaping political prisoner during ambush duty this morning.” Sgt. Kang replied, “Sir, I will do my best for the Great Leader and the Dear Leader.”

The commanding officer continued, “Did you see what Sgt. Kang did this morning? He killed a prisoner escaping from the settlement. He is now going to be rewarded for his good performance and is guaranteed a promising career. Don’t envy him, just do as he did!”

In fact, Sgt. Kang was not at the ambush post himself. He made me and

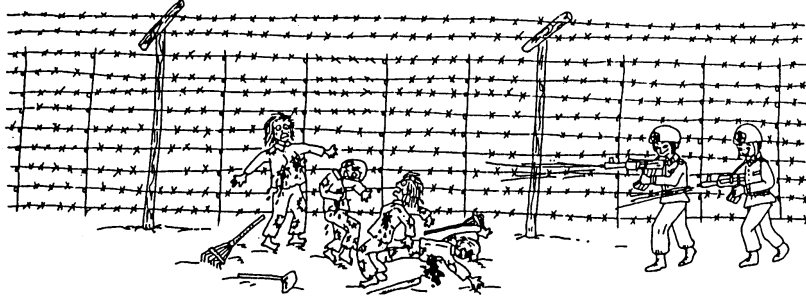
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another guard keep the post. He simply woke up early in the morning to urinate when he found a prisoner trying to catch rats. When we heard gunshots, we rushed to the site and found a young prisoner in his twenties bleeding and killed instantly, a lunch box by his side and an ax in his hand. The lunch box and ax were proof of his planned escape.

Actually, the prisoner was ordered that day to chop wood up in the mountain and therefore had received a lunch ration and an ax, as usual. He just wanted to spare a few minutes to catch a rat before his team set out for work. Prisoners were to be shot if they were within 50 meters from the settlement fence. Because of frequent killings by guards, no prisoners dare to be near the fence. Although the prisoner was said to have been trying to escape, he was nowhere near the settlement fence.

Prisoners Killed at Random for the Sake of a Good Report

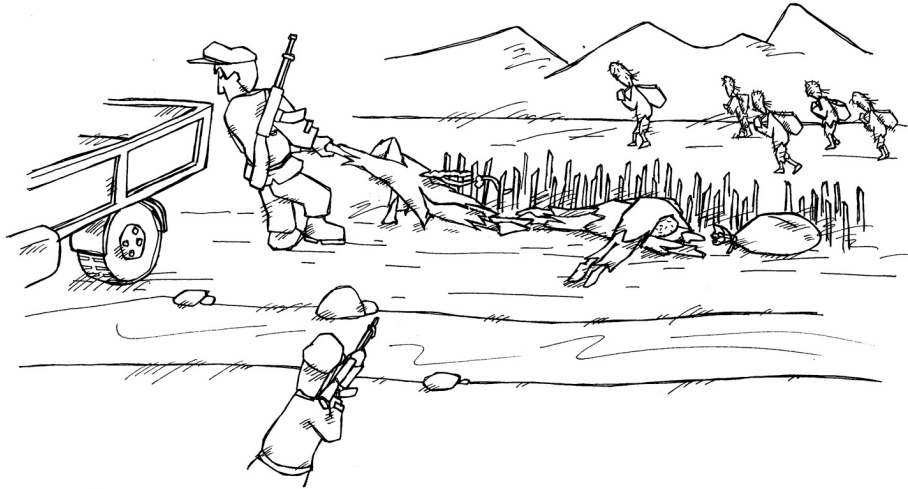
Reported by MC Ahn, former guard of detention settlements



In 1988, two guards at Detention Settlement No.15 forced some political prisoners to scale the barbed wire fence and then killed them mercilessly so they could make an impressive report. Similar incidents occurred in many settlements because trigger happy guards or officers were never punished for killing prisoners and no investigations were made into the killing of prisoners.

Male Prisoners Shot to Death for Attempting to Get “Edible Clay” from Female Prisoners

Witnessed by Sun-ok Lee, former prisoner of a political prison -



At the end of February 1990, we were carrying edible clay in bags. Some male prisoners on the other side of the river must have seen us eating the clay. They looked like skeletons with skulls and bright eyes. They gestured to us begging for some clay. None of us responded for fear of punishment. Desperately, three of them came to our side of the river to get some clay.

Suddenly, we heard shooting. It was a horrible scene when the shooting ended. We were all so scared. The intestines of one of the male prisoners were protruding. But he was still alive because we heard his feeble voice whispering, “Help!” The second prisoner had his leg broken and bleeding. The third prisoner was dead instantly. Soon a truck arrived and an officer said, “Put them all onto the truck, dead or alive.” We were told to resume our work. That night, some twenty women complained of pain and died as a result of having eaten too much clay.

At the end of February 1990, we were bringing fresh soil from a nearby mountain to the prison farm. It was very tiring to climb up the mountain to bring fresh soil all the way down to the farm. Because it was February and still cold, we could not find any plants to eat in the mountain, no matter how desperately we looked. It was too early in the season.

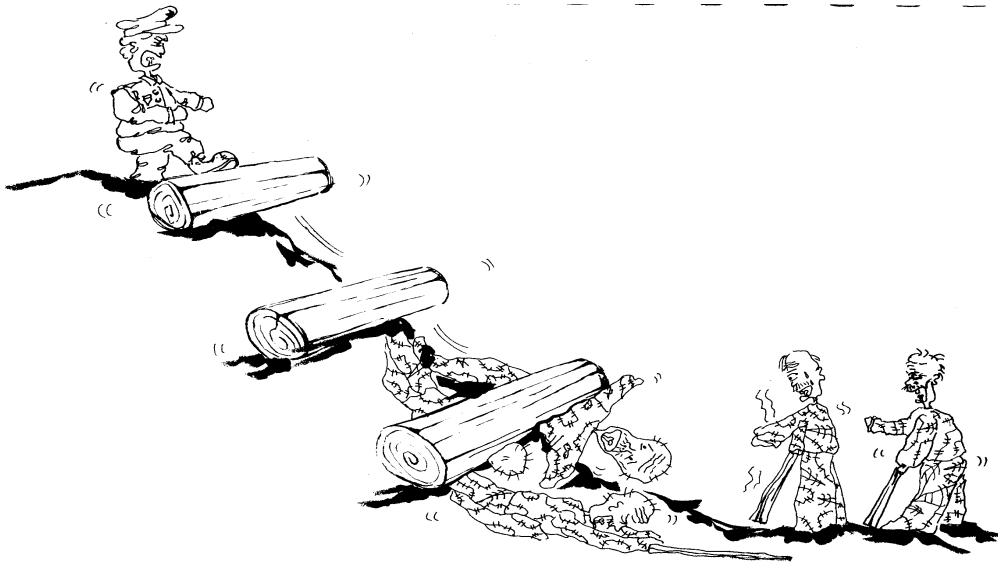
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One day, I saw some prisoners eating clay. As always, we were exhausted, hungry and thirsty. One of them said to me, "Accountant, you want some? This is good and tasty. Try it." I wasted no time and ate it. It was clay and, indeed, starchy and tasted good. I ate half the size of my fist that day and I felt somewhat full and even felt some strength, too. Our unit moved our burrow to a riverside location when the killing of three male prisoners took place.

Old Prisoners Killed for Stopping Work

Witnessed by Mr. Hyok Ahn, former detention settlement prisoner

One winter day in 1988, some security officers were returning from hunting when they discovered some old prisoners taking a rest at the foot of a hill below. There were three large logs on the top of the hill. The security officers quietly kicked the logs downhill. The logs rolled down on the old prisoners without making any noise because the snow was deep. As they kicked the last log, they shouted, "You s.o.b! How dare you stop working, eh?" The old people were startled and were about to get up when the first log rolled over them. Some were bleeding from the head, some suffered broken backs, legs, and arms, and others just fainted from being startled.



The security officers yelled, "You useless guys better die, you consume food and do no work!" When the officers reached the bottom of the hill, the victims were groaning for help. The officers did not show any pity or try to help the injured. Instead, they continued to shout, "Who is groaning? Stop it! Who is resisting?" The prisoners could not say anything. Usually, the wounds sustained from this type of accident would develop frostbite in the winter and begin to rot.

One winter day in 1988, we were collecting topsoil from the mountain for farms in the settlement when we heard some officer's call for us. We ran down the mountain to find that five old people were lying motionless on the ground. A security officer told us, "Look! These five old people are dead. You better bury them deep so that they don't feel cold. You better dump the mountain soil on them to keep them warm." None of us moved because the five people did not look dead. The security officer started to kick us and shout, "Don't you obey my order!" So, we started to dump soil on them one by one. "Be quick!," shouted the security officer. As we began to cover them with soil, they jumped up. The security officer started to kick the old men and yelled, "You s.o.b! You are supposed to be dead. How can a dead man get up?" He summoned guards and made them beat the old people brutally. "Skip two meals for them!" he ordered. The victims begged, "Sir, please, please kill us," as they were being dragged to the investigation office.

One of us said, "Yeah, what a nice opportunity to stop work, watch and rest? I like to see as often as possible so that we can rest a while." I stared at him for his cruelty.

We learned the next day that three of the old people died.

Corpses Buried and Found at Hillside

Witnessed by CH Kang, former child prisoner of detention settlement



Once, we children were clearing the land for farmland expansion. Bulldozers removed the bushes and clear the land for us to till. Shortly after the bulldozers began to move, I began to feel like vomiting. Other children began to complain, "What's that smell! Where is this nasty smell coming from!" "I can't breathe," another child said. We looked at the bulldozers and were so shocked to see so many corpses uncovered by the bulldozers. The corpses were partly fresh and rotten, arms and legs broken and skulls crushed! The bulldozers stopped moving. We were so used to death but this was so shocking. I vomited. The other children all ran away. I also wanted to follow my friends but I could not move. I was very lucky not to faint.

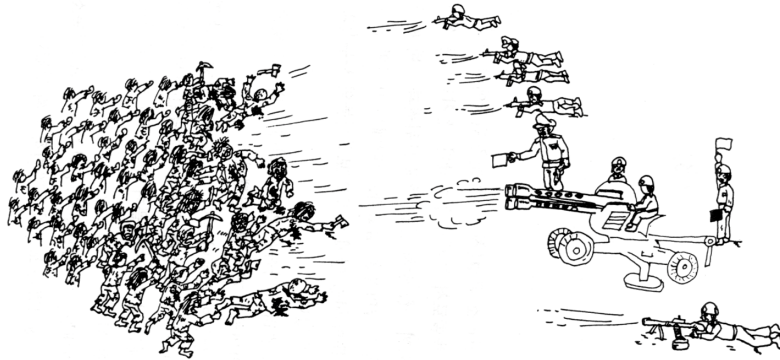
About two hours later, a bunch of prisoners arrived, dug a big hole at the foot of the mountain and dumped the corpses, some fifty of them, into the hole. The prisoners also closed their noses while working. One of them fainted. Then they covered the hole. The land was tilled and corn was planted.

Since then, no one wanted to work in that field. The security officers needed to use force to bring the prisoners here for work. One of the female prisoners was forced to work here one day and, as feared, came upon some human bones. She ran away from the work.

Strangely, the corn crop from the field that autumn was very large, considerably larger than the other fields.

Riot in Life Detention Settlement No. 12 in the Early Seventies

Report by MC Ahn , former guard of detention settlements



Political prisoners working in the mines at Settlement No. 12 bitterly resented the degrading treatment and rioted in the early seventies. The prisoners ambushed the families of security and guard officers with shovels, picks, sticks, axes and hammers when the officers had all gone for work. Almost all the wives and children were killed. When the security officers and guards rushed back to their village, it had already been destroyed and many families killed.

The guards fired at the prisoners indiscriminately and killed all the prisoners involved, some 5,000 of them. The prisoners fought it out but could not overcome the guards armed with machine guns and AK rifles.

Since then, the prisoners were treated more harshly and many prisoners were killed for minor offenses. The security officers planted informants among the prisoners, strengthened the control system within the detention settlements and improved the training of guards. This incident was frequently cited during ideology sessions as an example of why prisoners were our enemies and why we should be merciless to them.

A similar incident took place during my service at Settlement No. 13 in 1989.

A 27 year-old female prisoner named Choi was an accountant and a sexual toy for Yang-ki Chung, a security officer and her boss. She had free access to his office for this reason. One day, she waited for him in his office

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with the intention of killing him and taking his pistol. But she looked so nervous that the security officer became suspicious, searched her body and found a 15 centimeter long knife under her pants.

He was furious and shot her with all seven bullets in his pistol. The security officer was promoted from major to lieutenant colonel and transferred to Settlement No. 16 in 1990.

Riot at Yongpyong Life Detention Settlement in 1974

Report by Mr. Hyok Ahn, former detention settlement prisoner

It was common knowledge among the prisoners in Yodok Settlement that there was a prisoners riot in Yongpyong Settlement in 1974. According to the sources, prisoners attacked administration buildings with sticks and stones in protest against the food conditions, hard labor and degrading treatment by the security officers. The prisoners seized weapons and ammunition from guards and killed officers at random. They rioted because they knew that, whether they protested or not, they did not have any hope and would be killed anyway. They were finally defeated by the North Korean army and those prisoners hiding in the mountains and valleys were all arrested and killed summarily. No prisoners survived. Severe hunger and hard work have since continued to be the standard norm there.

Everybody in Yodok Settlement knows that Yongpyong settlement was



created shortly after the Korean War to detain South Korean collaborators, landlords and reactionaries for life. The settlement is surrounded by tall and electrified barbed wire fences and reinforced by traps at strategic locations for tight security. Political prisoners are detained there for life. No prisoner has left the settlement, dead or alive, since its establishment in the early sixties.

At that time, it was the young prisoners who were most active. Therefore, in Yongpyong Settlement, a child would be separated from the family when the child turned 16 years old and sent to further locations for much harder work for the rest of his life. Nobody knows what kind of work they did. What is certain is that none of them were ever seen again and none of them survived many years there. Yongpyong is a place to kill prisoners slowly through hard work.

2. Human Biological Testing

Among the stories of human rights violations and crimes against humanity that occur in the North Korean detention settlements and political prisons, there are a few accounts of prisoners being used for human biological testing. While the murderous system of prisoners in North Korea makes such allegations credible, the researchers reserve final comment on this issue until further evidence can be gathered in view of the serious nature of the crime.

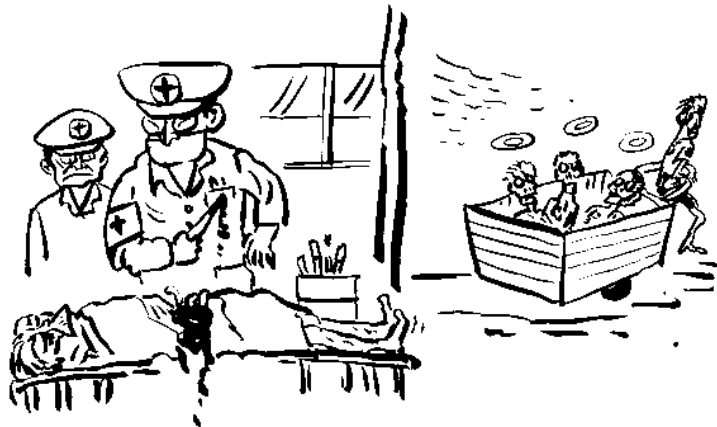
Prisoners Used for Medical Operation Practice

Reported by Mr. DC Choi, former detention settlement guard

There are no medical treatment facilities in the detention settlements for prisoners. There are military doctors, who are fresh from medical college, and a few nurses in the clinic. But they are for security officers, guards and their families.

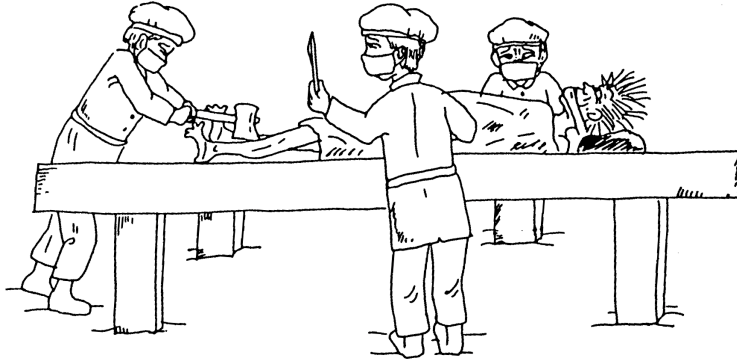
When a prisoner is injured during work, he receives primitive treatment only if he can go back to work after treatment. Seriously injured prisoners who have no hope of returning to work are not treated.

Often, inexperienced doctors operate on prisoners. But this is not for treatment; rather, it is for the training of young doctors. Consequently, many prisoners die from poor operations and treatment. Therefore, no prisoners want to be sent there. As a result, the doctors here generally enjoy the reputation of being competent surgeons by outsiders.



Prisoners Used for Medical Operation Practice

Testimony by Mr. MC Ahn, former guard of detention settlements



The doctors in the settlements are young and come straight from medical college. When they are first assigned here, they have had no experience and little practice. The families of security and guard officers know that they are extremely incompetent and do not trust them.

Therefore, political prisoners are used for surgery practice, without anesthesia or other necessary medical provisions. I used to drive for some of these doctors at Settlements No. 13 and 22, including a doctor Wu at Settlement No. 22, and I overheard their discussions while driving on many occasions.

I knew a good prisoner who was an auto mechanic. He always looked after my car well and kept it in good shape. We trusted and helped each other. One day, I noticed that his left eye had a big terrible scar and a squint. "What happened to your eye? Can you see with your left eye?" I asked. "Not well with my left eye. I had a little swelling in my eye and it was really nothing but Doctor Wu insisted that I should have an operation. He operated on my eye without anesthesia. This is what happened after his operation," he replied. We continued to talk about Dr. Wu's operations and the other doctors' poor treatment of the prisoners.

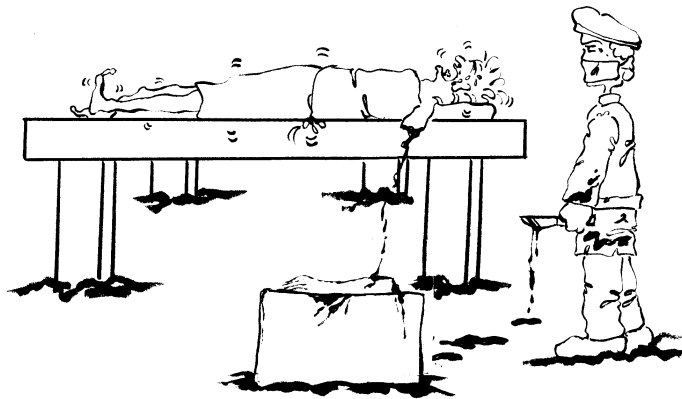
There was another mechanic next to him at the time and he showed me a big scar, the shape of a snake some 20 centimeters long, on one side of his abdomen. The scar looked awful.

“Dr. Wu and without anesthesia again?” I asked. “Yes, him again. He operated on me for appendicitis without anesthesia in 1991. I thought I would die from the pain and bleeding during the operation! It was a miracle that I survived.” I heard of many other surgeons like Dr. Wu in the detention settlements.

Prisoners Used for Medical Operation Practice

Witnessed by Mr. Hyok Ahn, former detention settlement prisoner

Hyon-chol Kim, 24 years old, had been here only a month when he was working with us in the frozen river during the winter of 1987. One day, several big stones rolled over him while he was working. He was seriously injured, his body torn, head bleeding, and one of his arms hanging. There was a clinic in the settlement but it was so poorly equipped and the doctors there are so rude to prisoners that all the prisoners avoided going there, preferring to die at their shelter quietly. But this time, the wounds were so serious that we decided to take him there.



When we arrived at the clinic, we found a South Korean female prisoner nurse there who told us that immediate operation was necessary to save his arm. While the nurse was looking after his wounds, a settlement doctor arrived and said immediately, "Well, we have to sever his arm." Surprised at his decision, the nurse protested, "You can save his arm, can't you?" The doctor replied, "Of course, we can, but not here. No injection and no medicine."

The operation lasted about one hour. I suddenly remembered the hush-hush talk in the settlement about the doctors here using prisoners to practice operations. My heart sank when I saw Hyon-chol leaving the operation room, with his arm cut off at a spot five centimeters from the shoulder. He yelled, "What happened to my arm, where is my arm...my arm! I don't want to live. Please, please, kill me." The wound was wrapped up with a kind of hard cloth, not bandage. Then, security officers arrived and said, "What's all the fuss

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about? This is nothing. Everybody move and get back to work!”

When I returned to him after work, he had calmed down somewhat but was weeping bitterly and complained to me, “You should have let me die there. I can’t see why I should live here!”

Women Have More Fat Than Men

Report by Mr. MC Ahn, former guard of detention settlement



In September 1988, when I was taking a driving lesson, I had an opportunity to take a rest at a rest room for security officers. Myong-hak Lee, the driver of the chief political officer, began to talk enviously about a “human bed.” He further elaborated that female prisoners were assembled like logs of a raft and covered with sheets.

According to Mr. Lee, the officers of the 3rd National Security Bureau sleep on such beds. It was believed at that time that the 3rd Bureau was responsible for secret executions, the study and development of torture techniques, and the operation of a human biological laboratory. What appalled me the most was their extraction of human fat. He said that prisoners were fried in a big pan for fat extraction and the results showed that women have 1.5 times the amount of fat that men do. When extracting human blood from prisoners hanging upside down, women produce more blood than men, he added. The bodies, after blood and fat extraction, are burned and the fats are used for special cosmetics for “Great Leader” and “Dear Leader.”

Human Biological Laboratory 1

Report by Mr. MC Ahn, former guard of detention settlements



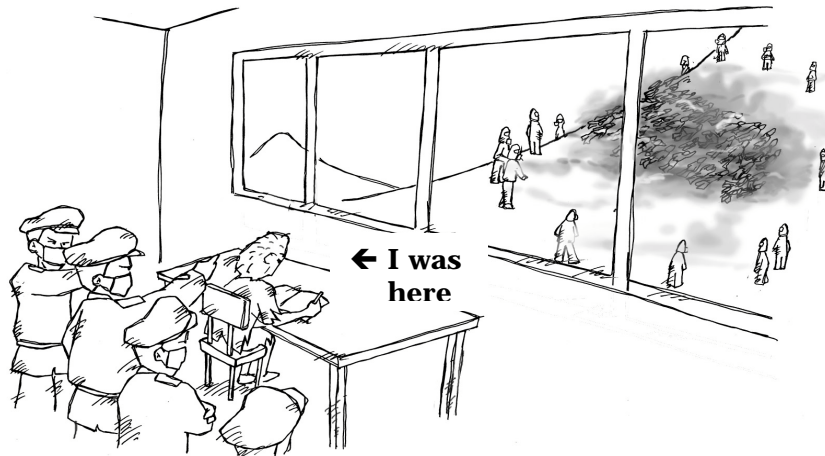
Once I was asked by a senior security officer to transport 1 ton of corn, 500 kilograms of potatoes, and 40 kilograms of hot peppers to his house. He was stealing from the settlement for his personal gain. At night, another security officer and I transported them to his house. Then, we were invited inside for drinks and dinner. The senior security officer was in a very good mood because of his gain that night and began to talk proudly about the secret executions he had been carrying out.

He asked me, "Do you know what happens to their eyes when prisoners are buried alive? Their eyes shine blue like animals at night. When they are buried up to their neck, their eyes begin to shine with hatred." The other security officer said, "They deserve it. Didn't they betray the state? You should have pricked their eyes with needles." But I wondered why they were buried alive, instead of just being killed.

"If you beat or kill them, you get their dirty blood on your clothes. You have to bury them anyway, right? Then, why not bury them alive so that you don't get dirty blood on you," said the senior security officer nonchalantly. The prisoners he buried alive were those who were accused of inadequate treatment of cattle.

Prisoners Killed During the Testing of a New Chemical Poison

Witnessed by Sun-ok Lee, former prisoner of a political prison



One day in February, 1990, I was doing routine paper work at the staff operation office at around 10:00 o'clock in the morning when, to my surprise, the prison superintendent, vice-superintendent, intelligence chief and three other unidentified officials walked into the room. One of them pointed to something outside my window. I was very terrified at their unusual appearance. Then, I overheard them saying, "Look! How powerful! What a great scientist Dr. Sung-ki Lee is, indeed! Well, from now on, its chemical warfare." Shortly afterwards, as I was walking to the other side of the room to deliver some papers to my guard, I saw them seriously watching something outside the window. On my way back to my desk, I took a quick glance outside. I saw many prisoners lying on the slope of a hill, bleeding from their mouths and motionless, enveloped by strange fumes and surrounded by scores of guards in the gas masks I delivered to the Chief Guard earlier in the morning.

In February, 1990, I was asked by the Chief Guard to follow him to an administration warehouse at 05:30 in the morning. He ordered me to check out six bundles (five units in each bundle) of gas masks with rubber gowns, which looked like a sea diver's kit. When I returned to my prison chamber, a total of 150 prisoners, several from each unit, were selected and separated from the other prisoners. The selected prisoners were mostly crippled and weak women who had less labor value.

I had to issue instructions for lunch with the same usual number for the male prisoners but 150 meals less for women. The prisoners started to exchange nervous looks with each other when the 150 prisoners did not return to work. An air of unusual tension and fear spread among the prisoners.

Normally, when a prisoner is sent to a punishment cell, an announcement is always made about why the prisoner is being punished to warn others. But that night, so many prisoners were sent to punishment cells for whispering, looking around nervously and exchanging signs of tension without the usual announcement. That night, the punishment cells were all full with a long list of prisoners awaiting punishment. Obviously, the prison authorities attempted to cover up the killings.

Around October, 1990, an engineer supervisor was sent here from the defense chemistry factory in Hamhung. He was responsible for an explosion in the factory there and was secretly executed at an underground cell in about a month. At that time, I was told to reduce the number of meals by one in the kitchen. Later, I was confidentially informed about the killing by a prisoner/nurse who was involved in getting rid of the corpse.

At that time, 500 female prisoners were sent from here to the Hwachon area for some kind of expansion work at a chemical factory. The prisoners returned in about a month's time. One of the prisoners told me that there was a special chemical research institute in Hwachon.

Prisoners Killed During a Biological Test

Witnessed by Sun-ok Lee, former prisoner of a political prison



One day in May 1988, I had been in the prison for only six months and I was still trying to get accustomed to prison conditions. I was working on the second floor of the export factory moving half-finished products from one table to another for assembly. During lunch time, I saw a pile of fresh cabbages at the kitchen entrance through the windows. This was the only time I saw cabbages in such good shape at the prison. I was so hungry that I began to wonder who would be the lucky people to eat them.

A little later when I came back to the same spot, I saw some fifty women prisoners eating the cabbage from a bowl with their fingers. The cabbages appeared somehow steamed. Soon, I saw the prisoners vomiting, bleeding from their mouths and moaning on the ground. I could not stay to watch more.

However, when I came back to the same spot again after a little while, I saw camp guards loading the dead prisoners onto a truck.

There were several strangers in white gowns around the dying prisoners. This was very strange because the political prison was under such strict control that no strangers were allowed inside. Then, I remembered that some fifty women had been told to come outside earlier, a few from each work unit.

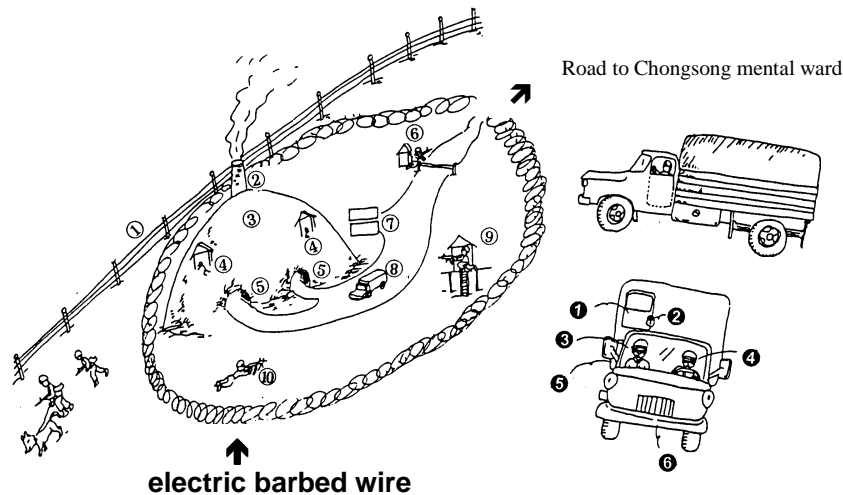
Later, it was announced that they died from food poisoning. The prisoners knew what happened and they started to inform each other through

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their eyes. The prison officials were very nervous trying to keep the prisoners quiet. Why were the prison officials so nervous over the food poisoning when its mention was not a subject for punishment on other occasions? Unusually, many prisoners were sent to punishment cells that night for whispering or looking nervous.

Secret Executions in a Human Biological Laboratory

Report by MC Ahn, former guard at detention settlements



- | | | |
|---|-------------------------|---|
| ① electrified barbed wire | ② a crematory chimney | ③ hill |
| ④ machine gun | ⑤ entry into laboratory | ⑥ outside guard box |
| ⑦ security control office | ⑧ paddy wagon | ⑨ watch tower |
| ⑩ 3 rd bureau security guard | | |
| ❶ entry for prisoners | ❷ lock | ❸ 3 rd bureau security officer |
| ❹ 3 rd bureau security guard, always armed | | ❺ mounting step |
| ❻ no plate number | | |

There is a top-secret crematory for every three or four detention settlements, where prisoners are used for biological tests, including the extraction of human fats to be used for the manufacture of cosmetics, or the dismemberment of male and female private parts for production of sexual revitalization tonics. I did not witness these atrocities personally but they were common knowledge among the security guards and drivers. This crematorium is under the operation of the 3rd Bureau, State Security Ministry. The above drawing is how I saw it when I went there one day in November 1991, with four other colleagues, after its closure.

All my colleagues believed that the 3rd Bureau was responsible for the secret executions, the study and development of torture techniques, and the

operation of the human testing laboratory.

One day in May 1988, I was on night-watch duty during a bright moon night from 2 ~ 4 o'clock in the morning. My heart stopped beating when I saw black smoke coming up for about 20 minutes at around 02:30 hrs. from the 3rd Bureau valley. I then realized that I was witnessing what oldtimers talked about in whispers. When I reported it to my seargent in the morning, he nodded with a smile and said, "Now, you see something. You must have been sleeping on duty if you didn't see it before. But, anyway, you better be careful about what you say because you never know when you will get shot in the back of the head.

From my guard position at Settlement No. 13, I used to watch smoke coming from the chimney at Chukki Gol over the hill at night every other week or so. Once a villager went inside the complex in search of wild herbs. He was killed to maintain secrecy. One of my colleagues strayed in and was about to be executed when my commanding officer somehow managed to save his life. The killing field at Chukki Gol was closed in May 1990 and relocated next to Hwasong Settlement, North Hankyong Province.

In June, 1989, I was selected to undergo auto-mechanic training. The training was hard but it took me to various locations inside and outside the settlement, a privilege when normal guards have no contacts with the outside world for the ten years they are in service.

Once in September, 1988, I was taking a rest at the security officers' barracks with other drivers while waiting for our cars to be inspected and repaired by prisoners, when we saw two trucks from the 3rd Bureau arrive and officers from the truck going to the security officers' office.

A driver said, "They are very lucky to receive special gifts from the Leader every month." Another driver intervened, "Do you know they sleep on human mattress like Hitler? The legs and hands of woman prisoners are tied together like a raft and put a sheet on them. The guys must be worse than Hitler." "Yah, they say they often fry prisoners in a big kettle boiling with oil. Every one dies in it within five minutes." They all laughed, "Yah, they say women have fat one and a half times more than men." Another driver said, "They are indeed merciless guys, killing humans like they kill a fly. See? They extract muscles from human body to make a whip. The nerve of them! How can they do it without getting drunk? That's why they are getting special rations

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every month. They always undress woman prisoners for fun.” Another driver said, “Yes, I heard them saying that they extract human fats by rolling a drum like you do to extract pig’s oil. The human fat is used to make special cosmetics for the Leader. And one of them told me that when extracting human blood from prisoners hanging upside down, women produce more blood than men.” All the drivers were half resentful and half envious of them. Suddenly, one of them cautioned, “Hey, look, we better not talk too much.” Then, every one was quiet.

3. Forced Abortions and Killing of Infants

The former female prisoner claimed that she witnessed the killing of newly born infants on two occasions. Her statements were very controversial among the researchers because of the utter barbarity of the act. Some North Korean defectors in Seoul, including a former North Korean police officer, refused to believe that the infants of prisoners would be killed just like that, even by the North Korean regime. This former police officer, who was a prison officer in an ordinary provincial prison for three years, asserted that when a prisoner becomes pregnant, she is temporarily released so that she can deliver the baby at home. After the woman's recovery, she is imprisoned again to serve the remainder of her term.

However, we would like to note that when South Korea widely practiced torture in the 1970s, there were many South Koreans who did not believe it. None of the North Korean defectors who dispute the former female prisoner's claims have ever been in any of the detention settlements or political prisons. While we continue to reserve judgment on this particular practice, we would like to mention that the circumstances within the detention settlements (i.e., the norm of brutality, the adherence to secrecy, the poor medical and health conditions, etc.) make it at least conceivable that the prison officials involved could have been tempted into killing infants for the sake of administrative convenience.

This chapter also includes witness accounts from the other two former guards and a settlement prisoner that are compatible with her allegations. The former guard, however, did not witness any of the infant killings himself. He bases his testimonies on common knowledge among his colleagues or hearsay from the settlement.

Babies Born and Killed

Witnessed by Sun-ok Lee, former prisoner of a political prison



When I miraculously survived paratyphoid in 1989, I was sent to the medical room to report. When I arrived at the medical room, I noticed six pregnant women awaiting delivery. I was told to wait for my supervisor to come and take me over. While I was there, three women delivered babies on the cement floor without any blankets. It was horrible to watch the prison doctor kicking the pregnant women with his boots. When a baby was born, the doctor shouted, "Kill it quickly. How can a criminal in the prison expect to have a baby? Kill it." The women covered their faces with their hands and wept. Even though the deliveries were forced by injection, the babies were still alive when born. The prisoner/nurses, with trembling hands, squeezed the babies' necks to kill them. The babies, when killed, were wrapped in a dirty cloth, put into a bucket and taken outside through a back door. I was so shocked with that scene that I still see the mothers weeping for their babies in my nightmares. I saw the baby-killing twice while I was in the prison.

When I went back to the medical room for routine duty a few days later, Shin-Ok Kim and Mi-Ok Cho, the prisoner/nurses working in the medical room, were sobbing and one of them told me, "Accountant, we are devils worse than beasts. They say that the dead babies are used to make new medicine for

experiments.” I was so afraid that I closed her mouth with my finger and said, “I never heard you say this.” I hurried to leave from their presence.

I was sent to the same medical room once again when I recovered from pleurisy in 1992. This time, there were some ten pregnant women in the small medical room. They were all injected to induce forced delivery and suffering from pain for many hours. One woman, so undernourished and weak, could not endure the delivery and died during labor. The prisoner/nurse there whispered to me that it is more difficult to deliver a dead baby than a living baby.

The other pregnant women looked so pale from the pain, and they had sweat on their faces. If they groaned from the pain, the doctor mercilessly kicked their belly hard and shouted, “Shut up! Don’t feign pain!” I was waiting for my supervisor to take charge of me from the doctor at the corridor outside. I heard the crying voice of Byung-Ok Kim, 32 years old, and peeped into the room through the half-open door. She had just delivered a baby and cried, “Sir, please save the baby. My parents-in-law are anxiously waiting for the baby. Please, please save the baby.” She was out of her mind with sorrow. All the other women remained quiet and she was the only woman crying and begging loudly. The doctor was taken momentarily by surprise. But soon, he regained himself and shouted, “You want to die, eh? Kill the baby!” He kicked her hard.

Then, the Chief Medical Officer came in and said, “Who was it yelling like that? Put her in the punishment cell!” The Chief Medical Officer kicked her hard several times and had her dragged to the punishment cell because she could not hold herself up. This is one of the scenes that I will never forget. She died shortly after she was released from the cell.

Infant Killed and Given to a Dog

Report by MC Ahn, former guard of detention settlements

**Common knowledge among guards,
a story repeated as a warning during ideology session**



The following incident took place in October 1987, about a month after I arrived at Life Detention Settlement No. 11. Sgt. Man-sun Kim was the deputy commander of my platoon and had sexual relations with a young female prisoner named Choi, an accountant in the 19th Unit. Sgt. Kim was handsome and kind-hearted and she wanted to have his child. She was about to deliver a baby, hidden in the farm, when she was discovered and arrested by security officers. She delivered a baby under torture. The security officers threw the newly-born infant to a dog during the course of the torture. She withstood all kind of tortures and refused to reveal who the father was. They pushed a stick into her vagina and screwed it until she finally confessed. Sgt. Kim was arrested, fired and dismissed from the party immediately. He was sent to a mine in his home province.

Another incident:

A young girl prisoner, an inventory clerk, was caught pregnant at settlement No. 13 in the fall of 1989. Under torture, she confessed the name of a senior security officer.

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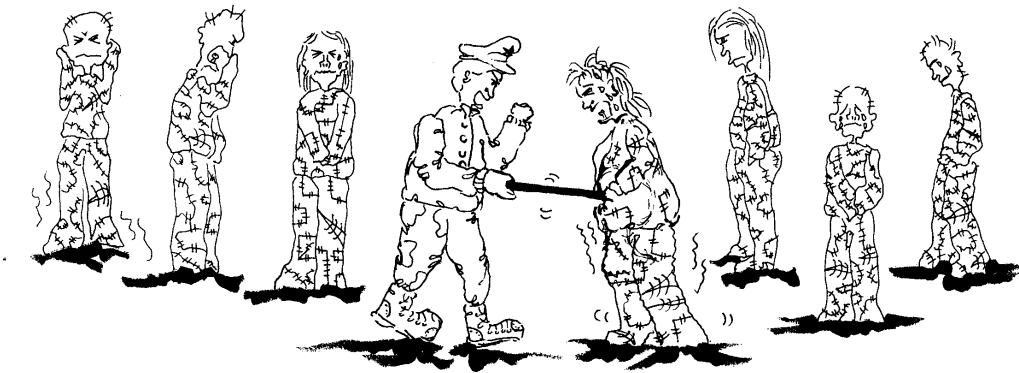
The investigators were furious so they cut open her belly, took out the baby and killed it by stamping on it. Then, they pushed an electric pole into her vagina and killed her by electrocution.

The investigators found out that the security officer was involved in sexual relations with other prisoners and privately helping them. He killed himself with his pistol in his office. This incident was regarded as a disgrace to all the security officers who knew about this and tried to cover it up.

Pregnant Female Prisoner Forced to Abort

Witnessed by Mr. Hyok Ahn, former detention settlement prisoner

Many female prisoners in the family sectors are brought here when they are only small children. They grow up with little knowledge of the outside world. They also develop strange sexual behavior and become accustomed to undressing for men. If a bachelor prisoner has an affair with them, his term is extended. But many bachelor prisoners succumb to their temptations because good terms with the women bring the bachelors better chances for additional food because most of these female prisoners work in the kitchen or food store. Severe hunger makes the men to accept any form of disadvantage for food.



The female prisoners know that they have no hope of having a home outside the settlement and so they want to have a baby in the settlement. Some female prisoners attempt to get pregnant in spite of the punishment of hard labor or the punishment cell. If a pregnancy is discovered, the security officers prick the woman's belly with a stick to induce abortion. Or, they take her to the office, throw her against walls and prick the belly until she aborts. If a woman is found in her sixth or seventh month of pregnancy, she is taken away to an unknown location. She is never seen again.

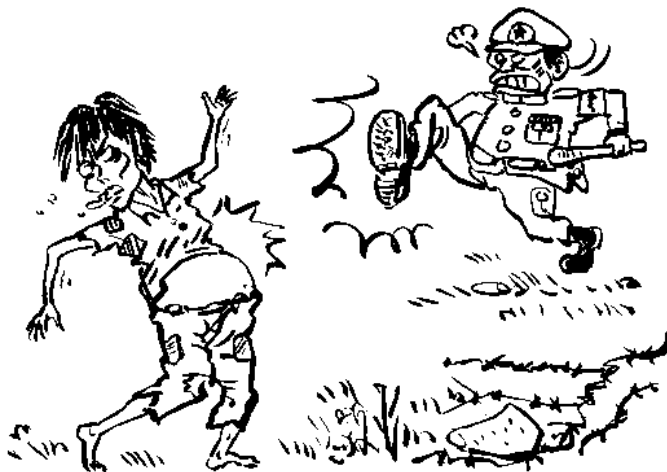
Pregnant Female Mistreated to Induce Miscarriage

Witnessed by DC Choi, former guard of detention settlement

Delivering a baby is absolutely prohibited in the detention settlement in order to control the number of reactionary elements. In most cases, husbands are separated from their wives and therefore it is rare that a prisoner becomes pregnant. There are cases of pregnancy, however, resulting from sexual contact between female prisoners and security officers or guards by rape or willingness on the part of female prisoners for favors.

If a female prisoner is found to be pregnant, she is kicked at or sent to do hard work to induce miscarriage. If a miscarriage does not result from repeated mistreatment of the expectant woman, she is executed secretly. All female prisoners are aware of this practice and try very hard to abort if they become pregnant one way or another.

The security officers or guards responsible for pregnancies are often covered up. There are cases when they are fired and expelled from the party or demoted for causing a female prisoner to be pregnant. Nevertheless, they are punished for having sexual relations with the enemy, not for the violation of women.



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