

# **REPORT OF THE VFP DELEGATION TO SOUTH KOREA**

*---We would like to express our deep appreciation to all those VFP members who supported our trip financially as well as other American and Korean groups and individuals who assisted our trip in various ways. Special thanks to Ms. Yom, Ms. Ko, Mr. Pyo, and Mr. Choi! Our trip would not have been possible without their kind help.----*



## **I) Introduction**

At the 2006 national convention of Veterans For Peace (VFP), a resolution was adopted on the current struggle of the Korean farmers against the expansion of the U.S. military base in Pyeongtaek. The resolution expressed not only our solidarity with the local farmers who are waging a just struggle against the unnecessary expansion but also called for organizing a VFP delegation to South Korea to investigate the current situation there.. Fortunately, an invitation from the Pan South Korea Solution Committee

Against US Base Extension in Pyeongtaek (KCPT) was received by the VFP-Korea Peace Campaign Committee in late August 2006, to attend the 9/24 Peace March & Rally for Pyeongtaek Farmers in Seoul. Thus, the VFP-Korea Peace Campaign Committee organized an official delegation of five VFP members to participate in the 9/24 event and visit other places of interest in South Korea (ROK).

## **II) Members of the Delegation**

Charles Atkins, a veteran of the Korean War who served as an Army artillery officer, is from Missouri. He received a Purple Heart medal for his wounds during the Korean War. He is a former member of the board of directors of VFP.

Thomas(Tom) Kennedy, a veteran of the Korean War who served as a Marine rifleman, is from New York. He also received a Purple Heart medal for his wounds during the Korean War. He is a member of the VFP-Korea Peace Campaign Committee and Chapter 34 of VFP.

Larry Kerschner, an Army veteran of the Vietnam War, is a nurse from Washington state. He has been a peace activist for a long time, going to Iraq on a humanitarian mission with the Voices in the Wilderness in 2000. He is a member of the VFP-Korea Peace Campaign Committee and Co-Chair of the Fellowship of Reconciliation-Western Washington State.

John Kim, an Army veteran who was stationed in South Korea in early 1970s, is a practicing lawyer from New York. He is a member of the board of directors of VFP and the Coordinator of the VFP-Korea Peace Campaign project. He was originally born in South Korea.

Wilson(Woody) Powell, an Air Force veteran of the Korean War, is from Missouri.

He is the former Executive Director of the VFP and a member of the VFP-Korea Peace Campaign Committee. He visited South Korea in 2000 and 2001 as part of the war crimes investigation team of the Korea Truth Commission.

### **III) Itinerary**

The delegation stayed at Holiday in Korea Hostel in Seoul. It is located in the middle of Seoul, has modern facilities, and inexpensive. One problem with the place was the existence of some mosquitoes which attacked us during night.

#### Thursday, September 21, 2006

\*Charlie and Woody arrived early. Dinner with members of KCPT.

#### Friday, September 22, 2006

\*John, Larry and Tom arrive. Larry had to take a taxi after missing a greeter from the KCPT.

\*Woody and Charlie spoke at an evening candlelight vigil of Korean peace activists.

#### Saturday, September 23, 2006 (Anti-War March & Rally)

\*We attended a press conference with a Japanese delegation from Okinawa on a street near U.S. Embassy in Seoul. Had the pleasure of being guarded by two dozens of South Korean riot policemen with plastic shields.

\*Joined a group of Korean activists in the anti-war, anti-base expansion march across the Han river for about two hours. Our feet got sore.

\*Participated in the afternoon Anti-War Rally in front of the Seoul Railroad Station.

Larry spoke at the Rally of about 2,000 people. Main slogans were "Bring ROK Troops from Iraq," "Stop Expansion of US Military Base in Pyeongtaek," "No Attack on Iran," etc. Some 3,000 ROK troops are still in Ervil, Iraq. There is a current debate in South Korea whether these troops should extend



their stay in Iraq or not. We were interviewed at the site by a SBS TV reporter.

\*Participated in the evening candlelight vigil for the 9/24 Rally. Tom spoke there.

Presented three presents to Father Moon who is a senior leader of the KCPT. Our gifts consisted of American vegetable/flower seeds for the Pyeongtaek farmers, a framed color picture of Picasso's painting (Massacre in Korea), and a VFP banner.

#### Sunday, September 24, 2006 (No Gun Ri & Peace Rally for Pyeongtaek Farmers)

\*In the morning, Mr. Choi, an adviser to the VFP-ROK, gave us a ride to the No Gun Ri massacre site, about 2.5 hour ride from Seoul. We were guided there by Dr. Koo-Do



Chung, a member of the National Commission on the No Gun Ri Incident and also a relative of the victims of the massacre. He explained to us the unhappiness of the Korean victims of No Gun Ri massacre with the investigative report of the Pentagon and the proposed language of the U.S. government for a monument to be built at the site. The proposed language at the bottom of the monument is as follows: "This memorial was erected by the U.S.

Government in recognition of the enduring Republic of Korea-U.S.A. Alliance." They are refusing to accept it—rightly so. We met three survivors of the massacre at the site and heard their personal stories. According to them, U.S. troops asked them to move out of their homes and led them to a railroad track. They were then strafed and bombed by U.S. planes on the railroad, killing about 100 civilians. When they fled into the two tunnels of the railroad, they were again shot at from both ends of the underpass by the U.S. planes and ground troops for three days, resulting in the massacre of some 300 women, children and old men. We paid our respect to the unknown tomb for the victims of the massacre, and presented three gifts to Dr. Chung: a VFP flag, a copy of VFP statement on No Gun Ri report of the Pentagon, and a framed color picture of Picasso's painting (Massacre in Korea). Dr. Chung explained that the Korean survivors will build a memorial museum and park at the massacre site, starting next year. He asked VFP's help in the project. American veterans of the Korean War could donate their articles of the war that they may still have or any art work relating to the war. VFP members could also help by donating some fund for buying the bricks or planting the trees for the museum. One of the survivors took us to a Korean restaurant for lunch.

\*On the way back to Seoul, Mr. Choi's daughter and her husband treated us for a tea.



\*In the afternoon, we returned to Seoul in time to attend the Peace March & Rally for Pyeongtaek Farmers in front of the Seoul City Hall. The five delegates appeared on the stage, receiving a warm welcome from some 15,000 people gathered at the Rally. John Kim spoke at the Rally briefly on behalf of the delegation. He informed about the 2006 VFP resolution on the Pyeongtaek issue and explained that there are concerned American people who not only

oppose the expansion of the U.S. military base at Pyeongtaek but also want our troops come home, instead of being relocated to Pyeongtaek. After interesting cultural presentations, a rally resolution was read. It warned that, if the ROK government does not stop its forcible eviction of the remaining farmers in Pyeongtaek by November 2006, then the KCPT would organize a general strike of all the people to stop the expansion of U.S. military base in Pyeongtaek. In the evening, the KCPT provided us with a dinner and gift of a traditional Korean shirt.

Monday, September 25, 2006 (DMZ Tour)

\*The South Korean VFP arranged us a guided bus tour of the DMZ area for foreigners only. As we traveled to the North along the Han river, we could see a long line of barbed wire fence at the edge of the Han river with military guard posts at regular intervals. This was part of the DMZ fence that continues across the middle of the Korean Peninsula. The first stop was at Mt. Odu Unification Observatory Post, which was built by the ROK government on the top of a mountain. Inside a modern building, we saw a video briefing on the North Korean town across the Imjin river. We could see an outline of the North Korean town over the other side with our own eyes. It was difficult for us to tell the difference between the peaceful scenes of the countryside on both sides of the river, and yet one town was beyond our reach. This seems to be a sad reality of the tragic division of Korea.

\*After lunch, we were taken to Panmunjom (aka Joint Security Area) where the Korean War Armistice Agreement was signed in 1953. We were first given an anti-North propaganda briefing at Camp Bonifas about the history of the Korean War and Panmunjom from the viewpoint of the U.S. We were asked to remove our VFP buttons and wear a so-called "UN Pass," which was obviously produced by the US military



command in South Korea. It made a mockery of the U.S. military command's slogan of "Freedom's Frontier" that was often displayed there. As if we were entering a Disney's Land, we had to change into a "UN Bus" to ride into the Panmunjom site after passing a thick, high barbed wire fence corridor. There were two modern buildings on the southern side of the

Panmunjom site. After entering one of the nice buildings, we were taken to inside a small hut where the Armistice Agreement was signed. Only South Korean MPs were posted inside and outside the hut. They wore sunglasses and stood motionless, like tough-looking robots. Like children playing a game, we entered the North Korean territory by stepping over the dividing line inside the hut. We were then taken to an observation

pavilion called “Freedom House,” from which we could take pictures of the North Korean building called “Panmungak” on the other side. Only one North Korean guard was standing outside the three-story white building. On the way out, we were taken to another spot where we could watch a North Korean village called “Kijong-dong” where a North Korean flag was flying on top of 160 m pole, the tallest in the world. A strange, unreal silence pervaded the whole area. There was only one U.S. soldier guiding us in the tour of the area. This was quite a change from the old days when the US MPs were in full control of the southern sector of the JSA. We were told that Camp Bonifas, which used to house the U.S. MPs, was turned over to the ROK Army in 2004. However, about 10% of the military personnel in the camp are still composed of U.S. soldiers who seem to be in real control of the JSA area. As a reminder of the continuing Korean War there, the U.S. was still flying the UN flag there, even though there was no official presence of any UN personnel

\*In the evening, the South Korean VFP group hosted us an American-style dinner. About 15 members of VFP-ROK attended the dinner along with Gen. Pyo and Mr. Joo who attended our 2006 VFP convention in Seattle. We introduced each other and exchanged our experiences in the war. Our Korean brothers and sisters also asked some questions regarding the structure, membership and program of VFP. As a joint project in the future, Mr. Pyo suggested that the two groups co-sponsor a joint meeting of veterans from three countries—the U.S., South Korea and North Korea—at a resort area such as Mt. Kumgang in North Korea. Such a meeting will help contribute to a better understanding and healing of the wounds among the old warriors of the Korean War. As a token of our appreciation for their hospitality, we presented two gifts to the Korean group: our VFP flag and a framed color picture of Picasso’s painting (Massacre in Korea). We also gave out our buttons.

**Tuesday, September 26, 2006 (Visit to Pyeongtaek & Press Conference)**



\*In the morning, KCPT committee gave us a ride to the village of Daechu-ri and Dodu-ri, Pyeongtaek where the local farmers have been resisting the expansion of the US military base. After riding about two hours down the South, we

were stopped by a police check point at the outer edge of the village. After some negotiations, we were allowed to proceed to the second police check point beyond which could not enter. We got out of our car and observed the area. On our left side, there was the Camp Humphreys, covering an area of one mile wide and two miles long, with an Army airfield and some 10,000 U.S. soldiers and their dependents. On our right, we



saw a long concertina-wire barrier and water-filled trenches that marked the new boundary for Camp Humphreys, which would triple in size in coming years to serve as the new home for the U.S. military command in South Korea. In our front, we also saw a heap of rubble from the demolished houses whose destruction was carried out by the ROK Ministry of Defense on September 13, about ten days before our arrival. A village farmer, Mr. Shin, came out to meet us. He explained that there are still about 200 villagers living in the two villages which are about 50% empty. He also told us that this is the third time that the local farmers in the area have faced eviction to make way for a military base. In 1936, the Japanese military took over their land to build a military base first. The U.S. military then took over the same base, and doubled the size of the base in 1952 by taking over some additional land of the villagers. Now, they are being evicted again for further expansion of the U.S. base. The ROK government set a new deadline for the villagers to get out of the villages by Oct. 30. It is expected that the South Korean government will use force to evict the remaining villagers in coming months.

\*In the afternoon, we attended a press conference at the headquarters of the People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy (PSPD), which was arranged by the South Korean VFP. Mainstream media reporters were present at the press conference. We introduced ourselves and received some questions from the Korean reporters, including Yonhap News. One question was directed to our delegates who served in the Korean War: How they regard the Korean War now. The common answer to that was that they didn't know what they were fighting for at the time, but now regret what they did in the Korean War. Another reporter asked about the rising resistance within the U.S. military against the Iraq war. We were joined in the press conference by Mr. Pyo of the South Korean VFP and Mr. Oh, Jong-Ryul of the Alliance for Democracy and Reunification of Korea.

#### Wednesday, September 27, 2006 (War Memorial Museum)

\*In the morning, except Charlie, the rest of us went to the War Memorial Museum of Korea, which is located next to the U.S. military command in Seoul. The Museum, built on a giant marble structure, showed various phases of the Korean War with a standard one-sided history. It glorified the role of the "UN Forces" in the Korean War, especially the US military's. However, there was no mentioning about any war crimes committed by the U.S., including the use of napalm and bio/chemical weapons or the bombing of dams and towns in North Korea. The history of the Korean War would be incomplete without our visit to another war museum in North Korea. One chart pointed out that some 1.7 million U.S. soldiers participated in the Korean War. That was a helpful information.

\*In the afternoon, we had a final farewell lunch at a traditional Korean restaurant with Mr. Choi who drove us around while we were in South Korea. A female member of the South Korean VFP came by and gave us a box of soaps as gift. We were overwhelmed with her friendship and generosity. After the lunch, we took an express bus to the Incheon airport and boarded planes back to the U.S. We had to bid a fond farewell with Mr. Choi and other Korean friends with a warm feeling of satisfaction and achievement.

#### **IV) Conclusion**

This was a wonderful trip for the delegation, especially for the veterans of the Korean War. It was a first trip back to Korea for Tom Kennedy since his participation in the

Korean War. We achieved what we had in mind, learned a lot, met many new Korean friends, and conveyed our solidarity message to the Pyeongtaek farmers, surviving victims of the No Gun Ri massacre, and the Korean peace activists. We came back with a new conviction that the U.S. government must change its policy toward Korea to heal the wounds of the Korean War, contribute to the peaceful reunification of Korea, and promote real friendship with the Korean people.

We submit the following observations and recommendations to the national board, the Korea Peace Campaign Committee, and members of the VFP:

- 1) It is apparent that the U.S. government is the real master responsible for the eviction of the local farmers in Pyeongtaek. The U.S. is trying to build in Pyeongtaek its largest, permanent U.S. military base in South Korea and relocate the U.S. soldiers there to make it easier to wage a preemptive war against North Korea or China. Increase our support for the just struggle of the Pyeongtaek farmers against the unnecessary, dangerous expansion of the U.S. military base in Pyeongtaek by writing a letter to our members in the Congress, especially to members of both Armed Services Committee, and educating other American people of the tragic sufferings of the Korean farmers in Pyeongtaek.
- 2) The Korean victims of No Gun Ri massacre are still struggling to achieve full justice for their pain and suffering. Try to hold a Congressional hearing and pass a special reparation law for the victims of No Gun Ri massacre. Extend our cooperation and assistance to the Korean efforts in the building of a special museum and park in memory of the No Gun Ri victims. Establish a long-term, regular visitation program to the site for education and healing purposes, promoting reconciliation and friendship with the No Gun Ri survivors.
- 3) The Korean War is still going on unfortunately, mainly due to the hard-line anti-North Korea policy of the U.S. Increase our activities for ending the lingering, costly Korean War by demanding a peace treaty with North Korea, withdrawal of all U.S. forces from South Korea, sending a peace delegation to North Korea, and co-sponsoring a joint meeting of veterans from three countries—the U.S., South Korea and North Korea—at a resort place like Mt. Kungang in North Korea.

Dated: October 5, 2006

By the VFP Delegation to South Korea

