

Pride of My Country

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January 31, 2020



On June 12th, 2018, all eyes were focused on Singapore when the President of the United States, Donald Trump, shook hands with Kim Jong Un the leader of North Korea. Folks here in the Republic were waiting anxiously and with great expectations for the results. Today we can see the results and decide how important they were.

Now days, I can't help but reflect on the reality of, not only that day, but the many days and years that had brought us to that point. What is it, more than anything else, that has made that day possible? No doubt in my mind it was the more than sixty five years that the United States of America has faithfully stood with The Republic of Korea. Three generations of young Americans have come to this country and stood up there on that wall guaranteeing the security and safety of South Korea. During that time, in security, South Korea has risen out of the ashes of the absolute devastation of war to become not only a first world nation but a leader among those nations.

South Korea today is an energetic democracy that is continually developing both economically and socially. South Korean companies, such as Samsung, Hyundai, and the Lotte group are leaders around the

world. I am continually amazed at the pace that new buildings, commercial and residential, are going up. The country is also engaged, as an open society, in confronting the ills of the past and grappling with the same issues that confront modern nations around the world. This is in stark contrast to the People's Republic in the North. When President Trump visited South Korea in the fall of 2017 he spoke to the National Assembly and highlighted this contrast. He spoke about the satellite images taken at night that show the bright lights of the modern, free, and forward leaning south and the darkness of economic, social, and political failure above the 38th parallel.

The young Americans who came here were not always the most educated or well behaved. They, typical of the young away from home and community, sometimes caused trouble, drank too much, fought, and I'm sorry to say committed crimes against the Korean people. But these were a minority. Most came here and did their duty as soldiers, trained to standard, and were always ready to fight.....tonight. They are my heroes and I salute them.

Before that, in Korea's darkest hour, the United States came to the aid of the small nation under attack. It is always said that it was the United Nation and troops from 16 nations that came to Korea's rescue and of course that is true. But it was the United States who did the heavy lifting in terms of resources, manpower, and blood.

About ten years ago my wife and I went to the city of Busan and visited the UN cemetery. There we found marble walls set up with the names of those who died defending this country. In alphabetical order, each of the sixteen nations had the names of their people who died carved into the surface. I looked at the walls of names and was immediately struck. Some nations had ten or twenty names, some only one or two. The United Kingdom had several thousand inscriptions. Then we came to our country. There was not space on a part of a wall or even one wall to hold the names. There were seven walls too hold the names of more than 38,000 Americans who died from 1950 to 1953. The names seemed to go on forever.

On that day we spent three hours there and touched each and every name. I cried and cried and I thought this is the pride of my country. These names represent the treasure of my country. Most of them didn't even know where Korea was when they answered the call to arms and yet they came here and these names are of the ones who never went home. The greatest pride of my country is not it's wealth, power, military, culture, language, or anything else. It is these young people who answered freedom's call and paid the ultimate price. On that day, I prayed to God that they will have not died in vain but that the Republic of Korea and its people will continue to grow and prosper in freedom. Now it seems we have the opportunity to bring the people of North Korea into this realm of freedom and prosperity. May their long dark night of oppression under tyranny soon be over.

On June 13th, the day following the summit, the people of South Korea went to the polls to freely select their representatives to their Nation Assembly in the by election and vote for candidates in the many local elections. For fourteen days the streets were alive with the candidates and their supporters campaigning for their man or lady. It's always very noisy with sound trucks blaring out the message, hordes of mostly middle age ladies dressed in T-shirts in the colors of their boss, and the candidates themselves shaking hands and urging all to vote for the right person. Some folks complained about the noise but it was soon over and I was reminded; it is the sound of freedom.

When Trump and Kim met again in February 2019, the meeting was cut short and much of the early optimism was dashed. Today, the north has gone back to blustering and threatening. The U.S. and the current South Korean government are negotiating hard over how much each should pay for keeping the nation free. In the meantime, somethings don't change. South Korea is still free in a large part due to the young men and women who are on guard tonight.