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North Korean Defectors

This essay was written for North Korean defectors who still wish to escape from North Korea. I am writing about North Korean defectors because I watched the video on the North Korean soldier Oh Chong Song's successful escape caught on surveillance cameras. That video showed me the difficulty of defecting to North Korea and gave me a feeling of the intensity and nervousness of Oh as he made his attempt. The video showed the despair of North Koreans who just want to leave and have a better life and the attempts of North Korean soldiers to stop you by any means. His video has inspired me to write about this topic, and Oh's story will also be provided in this essay. Starting with the Korean War in the 1950s, the southern region of Korea was in constant conflict with the northern region of Korea. This conflict was the difference in their ideas, with the South wanting democracy and the North wanting Communism. North Korea, China, and the Soviet Union wanted the Korean Peninsula to be a communist area. Fueled with each of their purposes, the two sides went into war on June 25, 1950, when the North Korean Communist Army crossed the 38th Parallel and invaded non-Communist South Korea. The United Nations, with the United States being the leading participant, provided support to the South Koreans, while China and the Soviet Union supported the North Koreans. The bloody war was fought for three years, and the Korean Armistice Agreement ended the fighting, but no official peace treaty was signed. Korea remained divided into two countries, with the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) being the boundary for these two countries. Many families were separated after this war and the wall along the DMZ prevented people from both sides from going past the wall. Soon, North Korea became isolated from the world, and North Korean citizens had barely any freedom. North Korea became a dictatorship, but the actual nature of the North Korean dictatorship remains a mystery to the world. Many families of North Koreans outside of North Korea don't even know if their families in North Korea are alive. They have no means of contact, simply not even able to ask, "How are you doing?" A defector is a person who has abandoned their country because of the opposed ideals. Many citizens oppose their countries' ideals and start defecting to different countries. The number of South Korean defectors is drastically more minor compared to North Korean defectors. These North Korean defectors wanted to escape from North Korea for many reasons, such as political, religious, economic, or personal reasons. These North Korean defectors tell us the true nature of the North Korean system. This starts the increase of cases of North Korean defectors into South Korea. Throughout time, many North Koreans attempt to escape their country through a lengthy, dangerous mission where one mistake can lead to their death. Most North Koreans fail their journey, while some lucky people complete their goals and gain their freedom. Most people don't know the hardships North Koreans face just to reunite with their families and live a good life. I consider my situation somewhat similar to theirs, but more preferably and suitably as I live in the United States, separated from my family in South Korea. It is hard to go to South Korea and meet the rest of my family with the current situation regarding COVID-19. It's emotional to see my parents only communicate with my family in South Korea through voice, where the only present they can give on their birthday is "Happy Birthday." I hope many North Koreans will soon be able to reunite with their families in the future and live the lives they want. The earliest dated case of a North Korean defector after the Korean War was on September 21, 1953, the same year the war ended. The defector was air force senior lieutenant No Kum Sok who flew his MiG-15 to the South. No said that he wanted to get away from the "red deceit." In 1954 he emigrated into the U.S. and joined his mother, who defected before the South. He was rewarded \$100,000 and became a U.S. citizen. He soon married a North Korean migrant and lived the rest of his life with his two sons and daughters. However, his actions brought punishment to people back in North Korea. His best friend, several family relatives, his battalion commander, vice battalion commander, the battalion's political officer, the air division's chief weapons officer, his regimental commander, and the North Korean First Air Division commander were all executed as a punishment for No's defection. His story shows North Koreans' efforts and the cruel consequences of their defection back to North Korea. Many other North Korean pilots followed his courageous defection: An unnamed pilot in 1960, Major Park

Soon Kuk in 1970, Captain Lee Ung Pyong in 1983, and Captain Lee Chul Soo in 1996.

One of the most daring escapes was caught on camera. His name was Oh Chong Song, a North Korean soldier. The footage captivated the world, a North Korean defector being sprayed with bullets as he tried to flee his authoritarian homeland. On November 13, 2017, surveillance cameras captured the moment Oh smashed through a military checkpoint in a jeep and raced toward the DMZ as the members of his unit were chasing him down. Oh knew as soon as he attempted this, there was no going back as he knew that he would be either sent to a concentration camp for political prisoners or executed if he was caught. He also knew that his comrades were lawfully allowed to shoot him if he tried to pass the border. He was only a few yards from the boundary as his jeep got stuck in a ditch. He climbed out of the car and started running, with the North Korean soldiers almost upon him. The North Korean soldiers scrambled to take up positions behind him and open fire. The soldiers fired many shots, with at least five shots hitting him. South Korean soldiers later crawled to him and dragged him to cover. Doctors who operated on Oh said it was a miracle he was alive. They found parasitic worms as long as 11 inches in his bowel, possibly from North Korea's poor food standards and hygiene. Oh spent eight years in the military, and his decision to escape was unpremeditated. Oh did not blame the comrades who shot him because they had to do it, and if he were in their shoes, he would have done the same. During his escape, the North Korean soldiers broke two rules: first, they shot across the Military Demarcation Line (MDL); second, one soldier crossed the MDL. Even though people are happy for Oh, we have to feel sorrowful for the North Korean soldiers. Even though they opened fire and broke the rules, they had to attempt to stop Oh from escaping. They most likely received very harsh punishment for their failure. Oh's escape shows the courage and luck needed to make a successful escape. North Korean defectors are very emotional and relieved with their successful defect. However, they still face many harsh challenges as a result of their freedom. North Koreans suffer unimaginably in their home country. Many suffer from chronic hunger while living in extreme conditions and constant fear of being sent to a gulag for what other countries would consider a minor violation. Families are often sent to these prisons for actions performed by relatives. However, their promise of a better life is met with severe prejudice. They face sociocultural barriers in adapting to the new society. Past exposures such as traumatic events, more extended defection periods, forced repatriation, psychological factors, discrimination, low income, family violence, and health complaints contribute to mental health and block their adaptation to life in South Korea. They consider the mental illness, low health literacy, and traumatic experiences of North Korean defectors living in South Korea. People need to welcome these people's comfort and provide community-based activities and information to these vulnerable groups to promote their knowledge, safety issues, and adaptation. South Korea and other countries should welcome these people with sympathy and assistance to adapt and be truly happy about the freedom they gained through their determination and bravery.