

월간조선

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>> 2002년 02월 >> 'SHOCKING REPORT'!

[SHOCKING REPORT] Political Prisoners' Camps in North Korea (1/10)

The testimony of An Myong-chol, an ex-guard at a political prisoners' camp in North Korea. (월간조선 1995년 3월 24일, 월간조선)

Resume of An Myong-chol

Birth date and place:

Born in Hongwon-eub 1, Hongwon-gun, South Hamgyong Province, North Korea, on Feb. 22, 1969

Education and Occupation

Aug. 1975~Aug. 1985

Graduated from Hongwon Senior Middle School, South Hamgyong Province, North Korea Sept. 1985~July 1986

Dropped out of Hongwon Agricultural Junior College, South Hamgyong Province, North Korea

Dec. 1986~Apr. 1987

Served as an assistant driver in the transportation platoon, Hongwon Commercial Resort, South Hamgyong Province, North Korea

May 1987~Sept. 1994

Served as a guard at Political Prisoners' Camp 22, Hoeryong, North Hamgyong Province, North Korea, under the control of the North Korean Ministry of State Security (hereafter MSS)

Oct. 13, 1994

Sought exile in the Republic of Korea

Below are excerpts from an interview with An Myong-chol, by Kim Yong-sam, a reporter with the Wolgan Chosun (a monthly magazine). The excerpts have been translated into English with the permission of the Wolgan Chosun. Center for the Advancement of North Korean Human Rights was established in Dec. 1994 for (1) raising domestic and international interest in the reality of North Korean human rights violations and striving for the improvement of the North Korean Human rights situation and (2) contributing to the reunification of the Korean peninsula and the formation of Korean Commonwealth. The Center for the Advancement of North Korean Human Rights has made a contribution to (1) raising international interest in North Korean human rights violations through holding international seminars and giving lectures and reports on North Korean human rights violations at international conferences along with publishing books on North Korean human rights violations and (2) meeting the goals for the improvement of the North Korean human rights situation through urging the release of North Korean political prisoners, raising public warnings and seeking solutions in close cooperation with various authorities such as the UN Human Rights Committee, foreign governments and civil organizations and in support for investigations by human rights organizations.

월간조선 E-Mail 1/4-02/2

Stark Reality of North Korea's Gulags

Defection of a Simple Country Boy

This is the account of a young, age 24. His name is An Myong-chol. He looks no different from many young men in the Republic of Korea (ROK, or "South Korea"), but Myong-chol is unique in the world because he can reveal the truth about North Korea's Political prisoners. (The English term "Political prisoners" is misleading in the case of most inmates in North Korea's internment camps.

They are guilty of no crime, have broken no law, not even North Korean law. They languish in North Korean Gulags merely because they are family members of political prisoners, who themselves are interred without benefit of trial.) An Myong-chol was born in 1969 in Hongwon County, South Hamgyong Province, the "Democratic People's Republic of Korea"-North Korea. He graduated from Hongwon Senior Middle School and for one year attended Hongwon Agricultural Junior College. To fulfill his military service obligation, Mr. An joined the Camp Guard Force which provides security at North Korea's internment camps.

After basic training, he worked as a driver at two Gulag camps, which fall under the control of North Korea's Ministry of State Security (MSS), Camp 13 (Onsong, North Hamgyong Province) and Camp 22 (Hoeryong, North Hamgyong Province). The inmates at both internment camps were family members of political prisoners. Not one inmate has been tried,, convicted, or sentenced, yet all serve the same term: life imprisonment. An Myong-chol escaped from North Korea and defected to South Korea on 13, October 1994.

Mr. An served for a total of eight years at the two internment camps, which North Korea calls "administrative centers." Mr. An's experience is unique because he is intimately familiar with North Korea's brutal "Maximum Security Areas," internment camps from which few ever return.

An Myong-chol sat down in a restaurant with me, a reporter for Wolgan Chosun, and we ordered Salty Onion Noodles, or "Jajangmyon." The noodles are served in one bowl, of course, and the sauce in another, but this confused Myong-chol. Flushing with embarrassment, he said, "This is sure a stragne dish!" He seement to know about coffee, though, adding sugar and cream like an old pro. But Mr. An got confused each time he encountered something new and showed himself to be every inch a country boy.

Myong-chol is something more, though. He is a man who served as a Gulag guard. He has witnessed enormous cruelty and seen inmates die wretched deaths. As a camp guard, Mr. An stood at the forefront of those preserving the North Korean regime, but he began to suffer doubts, asking himself, "How can human beings treat other human beings this way?" Guilt finally drove him to defect, leaving behind a beloved mother and a younger brother, who

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themselves now face the terrors of the internment camp because of his defection.

"Why did you defect?" The question came too fast, and seemed too harsh. Mr. An is very much a youth and remains far from mastering life in modern Seoul. I read shyness in his face as he answered: "To indict them for exterminating people." In August 1992, An Hyok and Kang Chol-hwan escaped from North Korea's Camp 5 (Yodok, South Hamgyon Province) and defected to South Korea.

They told us about "Maximum Security Areas and Indoctrination Areas in the Special Dictatorship Target Areas," and their defection revealed to the world the stark truth about North Korea's internment camps.

Maximum Security Areas Are Top Secret

An Myong-chol furnishes us with a priceless opportunity to learn what happens in the Maximum Security Areas. Kang and An Hyok earlier provided us an account of the camps from the perspective of inmates, while An Myongchol affords us a view at the camps from the viewpoint of the Camp Guard Force and the MSS, those responsible for control of the inmates. Taken together, then, the two accounts weave a damning tapestry of the Gulag.

We must recognize that Myong-chol's information has limits. We have, of course, no direct way to verify his account. The Maximum Security Areas are top secret in North Korea, and even South Korean intelligence agencies, which have world-class information on North Korea, have virtually no information about the camps. In an ironic sense, our lack of knowledge actually undercuts the credibility of An Myong-chol's information.

If we have no means to verify An's account, however, neither do we have reason to reject it out of hand. Little credible evidence suggested to the world the horrors of the murder camp at Auschwitz before allied forces liberated it. The absence of proof does not mean the absence of reality, however, and hundreds and thousands suffered and died in the German camps despite the ignorance of the world. The experiences and the accounts of those who suffer in such camps speak louder and more convincingly than does any ideology.

A second limitation on Mr. An's account is that he was only a camp guard, filling his obligated military service as a member of the Camp Guard Force. Mr. An was not a member of the MSS. The MSS administers the camps and conducts the secret executions.

Mr. An's experience in the camp was limited largely to the security mission of the camp guards, and we cannot expect him to be privy to the Gulag's innermost secrets.

That said, Mr. An served many months as a driver. This assignment allowed him to travel widely within the camps, so he saw more things and talked to many more people than other guards. His job also brought him into frequent contact with MSS personnel and senior administrators. Myong-chol accumulated an impressive amount of camp information.

I asked Mr. An to draw pictures of what he saw at the camps, and his drawings accompany this article. An expert on design reviewed the drawings, and characterized Mr. An's power of observation as "extraordinary." The expert said the drawings include detail that the ordinary

observer likely would omit.

I worked hard to screen subjectivity from Mr. An's account, investing many hours with the former guard to sort out what he saw and heard personally and what others told him. We tried to base the account on recollections based on personal experience and to indicate hearsay when it appears in the text.

I also met with Kang Chol-hwan, who had been imprisoned at Camp 15, and compared his narrative with An Myong-chol's Executions and Experiments on Living People

2,000 Inmates Missing Arms or Legs

An Myong-chol's fate brought him into contact with North Korea's Gulag in 1987. Mr. An was to be drafted and was slated to serve with the coastal Guard Force's 19th Brigade. Then he failed his pre-induction physical, complicating the situation. His mother was a member of North Korea's communist party; the Korean Workers' Party (KWP, or simply Party), and she went to see the recruitment officer.

Bribery is endemic in North Korean society, and Mr. An's mother's bribe brought immediate results. the recruitment officer then ignored the physical examination results and asked Myong-chol whether he would like to serve in an anti-aircraft unit or whether he would prefer to serve only three years in the military and then enter "political college." Mr. An's ears pricked up when he heard "political college," and he said he'd much prefer the latter course. Only later did he learn that "political college" is the term used for Camp Guard Force, the unit tasked to guard internment camps for "political prisoners".

Mr. An was soon on his way to basic training at the Camp Guard Force training facility inside Camp 11, in Kyongsong, North Hamgyong Province. A training instructor told recruits before they entered Camp 11 that they were absolutely forbidden to talk to any "emigrant," the euphemism used for political prisoner. The instructor repeated this warning several times, sparking the trainees' interest.

What in the world could be inside the camp, they wondered, that could warrant such strong warnings? The camp's main gate opened, and the trainees entered. The scene inside, Mr. An said, hit him like a sledgehammer. The area swarmed with dwarfs wearing the rags of slaves. "Are these humans?" Myong-chol asked himself. "Or are they animals?"

When I first saw them, I thought we had captured a bunch of the South Korean beggars we often see depicted on North Korean TV. One of my buddies said later he'd heard that midgets live in special communes, and he thought we were entering such a village. The inmates were all short, like midgets. They were walking skeletons, nothing but skin and bone. They frightened me."

I asked Mr. An what other impressions he drew of the inmates. "On average," he said, "they are about 4 feet 11. Their faces are covered with cuts and scars where they have been struck. Most have no ears; they have been beaten off. Many have crooked noses, only one eye, or one eye turned in its socket.

These deformities result from beatings and other mistreatment in the Gulag. About 30% of them bore such scars." Myong-chol was shocked at the large number of inmates who hobbled about with missing legs. Some have crutches; some walk with the aid of tree limbs; but all must work. Mr. An says 2,000 of Camp 22's inmates have missing limbs.

Basic training lasted two months. When it was over, Mr. An was stationed at Camp 13 in Onsong, North Hamgyong Province. He was assigned initially to a guard post on the camp's perimeter but later worked as a driver. He was assigned initially to a guard post on the camp's perimeter but later worked as a driver. He began to learn the truth about the Gulag in that assignment.

During training and throughout his service in the camps, senior guards ceaselessly drilled into Mr. An's head the single refrain, "Inmates are not humans." Inmates are slaves, not humans. If they live, all right; if they die, that's all right, too.

The first place the "subhumans" face extermination is in the detention barracks. Inmates who break a camp regulation or who are "obstreperous" are incarcerated in the detention barracks without a word of explanation.

Said An Myong-chol, "They shave your head as soon as you get to the barracks, whether you're male or female. You get 3.6 ounces of corn and a little salt each day, and you must try to survive on that. You can't see the sun, and you can't hear the wind. After a month there, all inmates become skeletons, walking mummies." Had the inmates in detention done something worthy of serious punishment, they could understand their harsh treatment, but most are thrown into detention for merely thoughtless actions or minor offenses-stealing something produced at the camp, misunderstanding a guard's orders, hitching a ride on an ox, showing too much interest in news from the outside, not following operating procedures, or producing less than the quota.

The psychological duress is horrible because the harshness is so disproportionate to the offense.

Camp 22's detention barracks are located near camp headquarters in Hoeyong-ri. It holds 50 inmates. The building has no windows or ventilation and reeks of blood and pus.

Detention barracks keepers mercilessly beat inmates during their time in detention. The hapless prisoners emerge from the barracks more dead than alive. From September 1993 to September 1994, An Myong-chol stood guard at an ammunition bunker located next to the detention barracks. "It was hard to pull duty there," he says, "because of the inmates' terrible screams and the ghastly sounds made by the keepers' blows.

The keepers decide who will be released from detention back into the general population. They decide also who will be executed and who will be reassigned to the "Major Construction Projects." Those to be executed have committed "serious" crimes: they disobey MSS personnel or camp guards, or actively resist their orders; they kill camp livestock; they impede production rates by rioting, revoltin, or attempting murder; or they get pregnant.

Those selected for Major Construction Projects are sent to work on secret tunnels or nuclear

facilities, meaning they will be transferred to the control of the 3rd Bureau, MSS. No matter where the Major Construction Projects are, though, inmates posted there will never return to whatever familiarity camp life afforded them.

The sadistic keepers torture inmates in detention all day long. the keepers force them to kneel with a thick wooden bar inserted between their legs and buttocks. The legs begin to rot after a week because the wood cuts off the blood supply. Those lucky enough to be released cannot walk and must be carried by family members. They usually die within six months.

Here in South Korea we believed that executions in North Korea's internment camps are conducted openly. Mr. An says this is not true.

Public executions are forbidden in Maximum Security Areas. They were conducted previously to instill fear or to make an example of an inmate. They caused antagonism and rage instead, perhaps because they were so frequent they desensitized the inmates. The administration requires the camp guards to mobilize in full combat gear for each public execution. We have to encircle the execution site so as to prevent a riot or rebellion. They had so much trouble they replaced the public executions with secret ones."

I asked Mr. An what inmates were subject to secret execution. "Those who know about corruption by the MSS, those who learn the camp's secrets, those caught while trying to escape, those who attempt murder, those who are dissatisfied, those who are pregnant, and those who get them pregnant."

Section 1 (Security) of the camp's Security Department conducts secret executions. The section's personnel hold the power of life or death over inmates. I asked Mr. An about the means of execution. "Whatever methods the MSS people want. They fret, how are we going to do it today? They decide on a whim. They use pistols on days they don't want to get their hands bloody. On other days, they kill them slowly and painfully just for the fun of it."

The MSS Executes Prisoners on Whim

I asked him for some examples of the execution methods.

I've heard but not seen myself that they beat them to death with clubs, hit them in the head with rocks, cut out their hearts with knives, or knock out the eyes by striking the back of the head with a hammer. If the condemned is a women, they may cut off her breasts, cut out her sexual organ, or insert a shovel handle into the vagina and force it upward until it reaches her throat. In the case of a pregnant woman, they may place a plank on the abdomen and jump on it until the fetus emerges.

Based on what a senior MSS person told me, they kill people as a kind of game. He said the'd bring out the inmate to be executed and use a pistol to play the 'hit the left eye game.' He said if an in-mate swears and puts up a fuss they sometimes strip him naked and bury him alive. Worst of all, he said, they sometimes take the condemned to the detention barracks where they force inmates there to punch, kick, and bite the person to death."

Sometimes camp guards and not the MSS kill an inmate. Here is one eyewitness account.

Said Mr. An, "It was the winter of 1990. Camp 22's Transportation Squad Leader Chu Sung-chol grabbed an inmate and yelled, 'You're not obeying me!' Chu threw the man down and stomped on his back, rupturing his liver. The inmate died soon after. The administration adopted a deliberately ambiguous attitude over the case and did not discipline Chu. You don't get in trouble for killing inmates unless you cause a commotion when you do it."

Camp 13's secret execution site was located near Sobaengnyon at a place called Onsok Peak. It was renowned as a secret camp used by Kim Il-sung in his alleged gurrilla resistance against the Japanese. Camp 22's secret execution site is located at Sugol; commonly called "Corpse Valley". Mr. an says the inmates do not know about the execution sites because they are guarded by a separate unit, the Sugol Investigation Unit in Camp 22.

When An Myong-chol was stationed at Camp 13, he served for a year at Sobaengnyong guard post, located a scant five meters outside the Onsok Peak execution site. The area was distinctive for its flat stone slabs that seemed to go on forever. Water from the nearby stream had a unique taste because, according to rumor, decomposing bodies were mixed with the water.

Mr. An says he saw a MSS truck haul condemned inmates into the Onsok Peak killing field once or twice a month, always at dawn. When the MSS truck passed the guard post and entered the execution area, the guard post commander issued a sharp order to the guard on duty, "Stand by where you are and do not move no matter what happens." Mr. An often heard gunfire crash from the execution site. He was on duty in May 1989, when, "Bullets fired by the MSS during an execution impacted very near the guard post, almost killing a guard."

Camp 22's Sugol execution site is a sandy area along a stream located out side the camp's perimeter barbed wire in a very isolated area. Mr. An said he passed by the site once a year during annual barbed wire fence maintenance and camped there on night while on a field training exercise.

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[SHOCKING REPORT] Political Prisoners' Camps in North Korea (2/10)

The Executed Are Left for Wild animals to Feed On

I asked Mr. An whether he had personally witnessed an execution. "No," he said. "They were conducted under tight security." His comments about executions are based on what he heard from others. Mr. An says, however, that in conversation with MSS people, they never stopped talking about executions. The executed Are Left for Wild Animals to Feel On I asked Mr. An whether he had personally witnessed an execution. "No," he said. "They were conducted under tight security." His comments about executions are based on what he heard from others. Mr. An says, however, that in conversation with MSS people, they never stopped talking about executions.

This is an area of potentially serious controversy, of course, because there are limits to the credibility of hearsay information. I repeatedly asked Mr. An the question, "everything you say is based on what a third party has told you. What evidence do you have that what you heard is accurate?" He got frustrated at this question and responded as follows.

¿°It is common sense that there are going to be executions at a camp. I was a camp guard, but they kept this secret even from us. How do I make others understand that the killings occurred? I can argue with you, insisting the executions are fact, but you saying no, but even as we argue many inmates in North Korea are facing death at secret execution sites. That's the only truth I know."

Mr. An says he heard often about secret executions because he was a driver. He says drivers had ready contact with the MSS. When his driving duties took him away from camp, Mr. An would do "capitalistic favors" for the MSS, (These favors involved helping MSS personnel with black market activities and other sordid means of making money.) In return, MSS personnel were in the habit of inviting Mr. An to drink with them.

¿°When they drink," Mr. An said, "the MSS people brag about their executions. 'I got him right in the eyeball! You should have seen the blood!' I took supplies to the Sugol Investgation Unit (the special guard unit which provides security at Camp 22's secret execution site) all the time, and they would tell me all about the executions."

What evidence do we have, however, that such executions actually took place? "I have seen the bodies of inmates killed horribly at the execution sites a number of times. Most of the

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men died from gunshot wounds, but the women did not enjoy such easy deaths. I personally saw women with their breasts cut off and women with shovel handles shoved up their vaginas. I've seen bodies at execution sites with the backs of the heads completely crushed."

Mr. An recalls that the MSS killed some inmates by disembowelment. One MSS person told a story Mr. An called "cowardly." "I was having sex with this inmate when she actually slapped me. I slit her." When the MSS kill a woman "who has committed the crime of granting her body to anyone," a number of them pull open her legs and "slit" her, disemboweling her starting at the vagina. Said Mr. An, "I have seen bodies at the execution sites with the entire trunk slit open, with arms or legs cut off, and with the throat hacked out."

이°Rocks dotted the landscape at Camp 13's execution site, so the MSS placed rocks on their victims' bodies. The place smells horribly of decomposing bodies, especially in the summer, attracting crows, hawks, and wild pigs. I've seen what remains of bodies after the animals feast on them."

Mr. An said he saw bodies from which wild animals had eaten all the internal organs. He was enraged. "How can they treat the dead that way?"

The Camp Guard Force's field combat training exercise course passed by Camp 22's secret execution site. Mr. An says a number of guards vomited while looking for firewood when they discovered a human corpse crawling with insects. Mr. An trembled as he told about unearthing a human skeleton while setting up a tent during a training exercise near Sugol.

An Myong-chol heard about experiments on living people. He learned that Gulag doctors conduct experiments very much like those perpetrated by the Japanese Army's infamous 731st Unit and by Nazi death camp doctors.

North Korean internment camps have two very different types of hospitals. One treats inmates, while the MSS and camp guards use the other. Camp 22's MSS hospital is located at Chungbong; inmate hospitals are located at Raksaeng and at the coal mine.

The Chungbong hospital, at least, had some medicine and some medical facilities, but the inmate hospitals virtually never have drugs. The coal mine produces a steady stream of crushed limbs, for which the doctors' standard treatment is amputation, although without the benefit of anesthesia. The patients' screams break glass they are so awful. The hospital workers stuff rags in their mouths.

Sadistic Experiments on Living Human Beings

The Chungbong hospital military staff consists of 10 military medical officers and three nurses. The medical officers are new graduates of the Military Medical College and know virtually nothing about operating techniques. They routinely kill or cripple people on the operating table with their tentative and bungling procedures.

이°It was August 1990 at Camp 13. One of my fellow guards, Comrade Yi Yong-gon, collapsed on duty with a stomach ulcer, and we took him to the hospital. Medical Officer U

was on duty. U examined Yi, who was sweating profusely, said Yi had an upset stomach, and gave him some herbal powder for indigestion. Yi's ulcer had advanced to the point that his stomach was ready to explode, but U didn't know how to operate, so to cover up he treated Yi for digestion."

Yi's stomach in fact ruptured the next day, and he died. This incident enraged the guards, and a group of them beat U up, frightening the medical officer so badly that he seldom ventured out of the hospital thereafter. U decided to improve his operating technique and began to have inmates brought to him for practice. Inmates with serious diseases like pneumonia and tuberculosis were sent to U.

He would tell them he could cure their condition and then proceed to conduct experimental surgery unrelated to their ailments. He opened up the abdomens of patients who had no need for such a procedure, just to practice his surgical technique. U removed different organs from inmates, killing many and permanently crippling others. Mr. An tells of cases in which Military Medical Officer U conducted an experiment on a living person.

¡°Raksaeng Zone Direct Command Tractor Platoon Leader Kim Kyongchan, 35, was taken to U. There was nothing wrong with Kim. U made an incision about eight inches long in Kim's abdomen and removed his appendix without administering anesthesia. They couldn't stop the hemorrhaging for a long time, and Kim barely managed to survive. They forcibly operated on the perfectly healthy eye of Tractor Operator Kim Bok-nam, 25. Kim's eye turned permanently inward after the surgery."

Military Medical Officer U practiced on live subjects for two years, and in the end won respect for his improved medical skills. Nor was U's an isolated case. All the medical officers used the inmates to gain surgical experience their training neglected.

I asked Mr. An whether he personally had witnessed experimental medical procedures performed on living human beings, and he acknowledged he had not, that his information came from others. Mr. An said, however, he heard "hundreds" of accounts of experiments on living humans from doctors as he drove them to and from duty or drove them to the scene of accidents.

¡°Each military medical officer had conducted at least 50 experiments on living people," said Mr. An. "I heard their brave stories many times, how they opened up some hapless inmate free from medical flaw and cut out his liver or some other organ. So common was knowledge of these practices that camp guards universally believe that medical experiments create most of the camp's numerous cripples, many of whom are missing arms or legs."

MSS dependents also used Camp 22's Chungbong Hospital. Those whose maladies persist after treatment complain to the doctors, asking them why they can't cure them after all their practice on inmates. The plain fact is the medical officers experiment and practice on inmates so as to develop skills they can use in treating the MSS, the camp guards, and their dependents.

Inmate Kang Chol-hwan escaped from Camp 15 and adfected to South Korea, and he supports Mr. An's account. "I heard often that inmates kept in the Ideological indoctrination Area were made victims of medical experiments." Kang said rumor had it that if an inmate

became ill, he would be taken away, given an injection, and become the subject of a practice operation in a medical procedure, such as opening an abdomen. Sex and Execution

Why Is Sex Banned in the Gulag?

One of the most unusual facts to emerge from An Myong-chol's account is that North Korea bans sex in the Gulag. If camp officials discover that a couple has had sexual relations, they are dragged to the detention barracks to undergo "instruction"(merciless beatings).

Once the keepers instruct the couple sufficiently, they send the man to a Major Construction Project and assign the woman to "disciplinary labor" at the coal mine. (An inmate must work underground for a solid week during disciplinary labor.) If the woman is pregnant, the MSS execute both her and the baby's father. Mr. An said women who get pregnant usually wrap their stomachs tightly to disguise the pregnancy as long as possible.

They are killed when discovered. "Births are sometimes allowed in the camps," said Mr. An. "A husband and wife who are imprisoned at the same time can have children. Very obedient inmates may be allowed to marry and have children. Camp rules forbid other pregnancies or births."

What, I asked Mr. An, are the reasons the camps ban sex? why do they execute women who get pregnant? "first," he said, "there's the danger that unrestricted sexual activity, pregnancy, and childbirth will trigger a population explosion in the camps. And, second, women who are pregnant, who deliver babies, and who raise young children are not available to perform camp labor."

No amount of intimidation can alter basic instincts. Can male inmates be interested sexually, however, in women inmates who cannot bathe, who lack any semblance of feminine shape, and who dress in rags?

"These people." Mr. An says, "have lost all hope and live like animals. In such circumstances, sexual release becomes even more a basic instinct." **Directive on Political Prisoners** by Kim Il-Sung "We must make class enemies taste clearly the dictatorship of the proletariat.

"Factional elements are stumbling blocks to our revolution, and the revolution must single them out for eradication.

"Factionalism produces class enemies who must be annihilated again and again, without fail.

"Weeds must be eradicated in their season, destroyed to the roots.

"Exploitative elements and factional elements in the past got fat by sucking the sweat and blood of our people. We must annihilate these elements without regard for their situation today, and push ahead with no further thought of them.

"I understand class enemies in our Administrative Centers (internment camps) often riot and revolt. We must station Army troops there to see they do not do that again.(Delivered in

1968.)

¡ªWe must commend highly military members of the Camp Guard Force who apprehend escapees, and we must strengthen ideological indoctrination among them so they are hostile toward factional elements.

¡ªMSS personnel in charge of class enemies must not be induced to feel the slightest humanity or empathy for them. They must execute their control duties always with revolutionary awareness. They must clearly reveal to these class enemies just what constitutes the dictatorship of the proletariat.

¢, Kim Jong-Il

¡ªBastards who escape must be run to the ground and killed one by one. The Honorable Leader's prestigs and foreign influence can be hurt more by an escape than by any other thing. So bastards who escape must be killed without mercy.

¡ªYou comrades (MSS and camp guards) must be perfect in your control and your surveillance so that you do not let a single bastard excape, for that would cause the Honorable Leader to worry.

¡ªThe 7th Bureau of the MSS does not exist for production. It exists to deal violently with class struggle. You must strengthen your uncompromising struggle against class enemies and factional elements.

¡ªPersonnel of the MSS Farm Guidance Bureau (7th Bureau) and the Camp Guard Force must take pride in the fact they stand on the forward outpost Line of our class. They must bring joy to the Honorable leader by conducting camp control activities without blemish and by preventing any of the emigrants (political prisoners) from escaping.

Mr. An says he experienced real human compassion for "these pitiful people" as he watched the inmates risk their lives to have sex. Mr. An's compassion didn't prevent him from describing camp incidents that developed from this problem.

The inmates engage in sex mostly at noontime because camp guards and the MSS enter rooms repeatedly at night unannounced to check to see if inmates have escaped. The inmates hurry through lunch and then have time only for momentary sexual union, usually in toilet, a corn field, or in the brush and foliage. The guards call this activity "rabbit sex" or "lightning sex."

Age is not a factor in these sexual liaisons. The women usually initiate sex because, Mr. An says, women hold up better than men in the extreme conditions which prevail in the camps. The camps do not discriminate among inmates, either along sexual lines or by age. Inmates perform camp labor whether young, old, male, or female, and they subsist on the same rations. The women grow coarse in personality, becoming wild, like animals.

There are many cases in which trouble develops when a camp guard or MSS officer has sex with a female inmate. The MSS execute the woman if she becomes pregnant. The man may

be demoted, lose his position, or be "discharged from life," which means being returned to one's birthplace with a blemished record that rules out any chance of joining the Party. Mr. An told me about some problems experienced by guards and MSS personnel.

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[SHOCKING REPORT] Political Prisoners' Camps in North Korea (3/10)

You die if You're Pregnant

Kim Man-su was a member of the North Korean elite. He was a deputy platoon leader in the Camp Guard Force at Camp 13 and was allowed to join the Party at the earliest possible age. Kim liked to hunt wild boar around the Salbawi guard post, near Work Group 19 in the Tongpo Zone. Hunting frequently in the area, Kim met Work Group Guide Choe, and she soon became pregnant. Choe bound her swelling abdomen tightly under her clothing and she managed to escape notice. She we working in a field in her ninth month when the baby came. The MSS took her away.

Her baby was no bigger than a fist, since Choe had little to eat during the pregnancy and bound herself so tightly for so long. She would not reveal the name of the baby's father, even after initial MSS torture because she did not want Kim to be disciplined.

This enraged the MSS torturers. who threw the baby to a dog, and put a snake into Choe's vagina. As the torture worsened, she finally told the MSS the father's name. The MSS executed Choe and banished Kim to the Unyul Mine.

Mr. An says women inmates who become pregnant by the MSS or camp guards are killed in a more brutal way than are other pregnant women. Mr. An says this is a form of revenge against women inmates who tempt the MSS or the guards into sexual activity that ruins careers.

In October 1989, an MSS major shot himself with a pistol at a unit dayroom in Camp 13's Punggye Zone. The major used all the women guides under his jurisdiction in the 7th Work Group as so many sex toys. He sold the inmates old shoes, clothes, and makeup and made 20,000 won.(Inmates earn 500 won per year to keep them from rioting.) In the midst of the major's black market activities and sexual athletics, a 7th Work Group Guide named Yi, 28, got pregnant.

When her size betrayed her, the MSS hauled her to the detention barracks, but she held up under initial torture and would not reveal the name of the baby's father. The MSS torturers slit her stomach open, tore out the fetus and stomped it to death, forced an iron lever into her vagina, and applied highvoltage electricity to the lever. Yi thrashed and turned red before virtually burning to death.

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Shovel Handles

The MSS abandoned her body at the execution site, placing a large rock on her stomach to keep the body in place. (Mr. An says he saw bodies with rock on their stomachs at the execution site.) The MSS major heard the woman had been sent to detention, and realizing his political life was over, he ended the rest of his life with a pistol.

When Mr. An was stationed at Camp 13 in 1989, Senuir Private O Wonchol of Platoon 3, Company 2, was on roving patrol when he encountered a young inmate and raped her. (O now serves as 3rd squad leader, 2nd platoon, 4th company at Camp 22.) The frightened girl reported the rape to the MSS. The investigation that followed revealed O's father to be Dean of Faculty at the MSS Political College, so no action was taken against Senior Private O.

The girl was not nearly so lucky. She was killed for "running naked at± and seducing Private O. She died horribly. They cut off her nipples and shoved a shovel handle up he vagina until it reached the throat.(Mr. An said he saw a body with a shovel handle in its vagina.) Mr. An told me about a girl whose name he could not remember. She repatriated to North Korea from overseas and was interned at Camp 13. People said she was related to an executive in the Chongryon-the pro-Pyongyang General Association of Korean Residents in Japan.

She was a pretty, gentle person, and a detention barrack's keeper began secretly giving her food, and before long fell in love with her. She complained about being sent to an internment camp in a letter to a relative in Japan and asked the keeper to mail the letter, which he did, allowing an inmate to communicate with the outside world.

The extra food she consumed caused her face to fill out, someone noticed, and she was sent to the detention barracks. The suspicious keepers tortured her most maliciously, pumping a smooth piece of wood the size of a penis in and out of her vagina in such a way as to keep her in a state of heightened sexual arousal for two hours, eventually causing her to lose her mind. At some point, she told her torturers the story of her secret food supply. The guilty keeper was put on restrictions. The MSS executed the inmate.

An Myong-chol did not witness the incident above but heard most of it from a MSS interlocutor. Mr. An did witness the result of an incident involving Han Chin-tok, 23, an inmate at Camp 22. Han was very beautiful, and a number of the guards fell desperately in love with her. Her father was a veterinarian in Kanwon Province's Anbyon and was closely related to Kim Changbong, a senior official who was purged. Han's whole family was sent to the camps when Kim was purged. In 1991, An Myong-chol was put in charge of the pig pens and got to know Han, who worked at the pens.

Camp Guard Force company commander Yang Gi-chol started visiting the pens frequently, entering the area after getting the keys from an, whose squad leader ordered him to turn over the keys. Mr. An didn't think any more about it, but Yang and Han were having sexual relations in the pens. Somebody turned them in. Yang was put on restrictions, and the MSS hauled Han away to detention, where Mr. An understood she had died.

Later, Mr. An went to pick up a load of coal at the camp's mine and saw Han Chin-dok there.

He was glad to learn she had survived and spoke to her. She told him the detention barracks keepers gang-raped her and then tortured her severely. They inserted a pipe in her vagina, hurt her in every possible way, and finally heated up a skewer and branded an X on her chest.

Sex Between Brothers and Sisters, Mothers and Sons

Sobbing, and Chin-dok showed Mr. An the scar the hot metal left on her chest. The shape of the X was very distinct on her breasts. Mr. An asked her why they let her live, and she said, "Because I was a MSS spy." Han was pulling disciplinary labor in the mine sometime later and was involved in a tunnel cart accident that cost both her legs. When she recovered she was assigned to Work Group 44, where she shucked corn all day. Mr. An said Han Chin-dok was the only female involved in such a sexual incident he had ever known to survive.

Sexual activity is so circumscribed in the camps that it is an open secret that brothers and sisters and mothers and sons engage in sexual activity with each other. Mr. An said, "The inmates are not human beings, and refined traits like morality and virtue simply don't exist among them." The MSS were so dumfounded when they caught a mother and son in sexual relations that they didn't kill them, satisfying themselves by assigning the son to disciplinary labor in the coal mine.

An Myong-chol spoke directly with inmate Choe Sun-ae, 26, about her sexual relationship with her brother, Choe Hui-yu, 24. Mr. An asked Sun-ae how she handled her sexual desires, and she responded as follows. "When we sleep at night and sexual cravings occur and I can't sleep, I play with my brother's penis. In the heat of passion, I don't think of him as my little brother, just as a man. Mother knows we do it, but she pretends she doesn't."

Sun-ae eventually became pregnant by her brother. She did everything to abort the fetus, jumping off a cliff, eating toxic weeds, and drinking contaminated water. the fetus refused to abort. she stabbed herself in the abdomen with a stick; she even drank urine. Nothing worked. She finally ate poisonous royal azalea root, and this aborted the fetus but damaged her liver to the point where she almost died.

The other inmates are very envious of a brother and sister because they can relieve their sexual desires with comparative ease.

Stripped of the Right to Die

Death is very common in the camps. the inmates see it as a natural thing, but that does not stop them from struggling any way they can to cling to life. They will do anything for a single ear of corn, or a single chunk of pig fat. Despite the survival instinct, however, many die anyway, about 6-7 per day in each camp, from sickness, starvation, execution, or accident.

¶If a guard catches an escaping inmate, the guard not only is allowed to join the Party, he gets to go to college, too. These rewards cause abuses, cases where a guard with an eye on his future uses his rifle to force an inmate to cross the barbed wire fence marking the camp perimeter and then shoots the inmate when he is on the other side." This gambit became so

common that such incidents became the object of an official investigation.

A Camp Guard Force junior sergeant assigned to Camp 22's Sechon Guard Post was walking guard when he happened upon a young female inmate. He took a good look at her and recognized her as a girl from his class in middle school on whom he had had a crush. She explained to the sergeant that she had been interned because her father committed an offense. The guard told her to come to the same place the next day, and he would help her escape.

She was back the next night. The junior sergeant first had sex with her, then told her to climb the fence and escape. She negotiated the fence without the slightest suspicion. Once she was over, the sergeant shot her dead. The investigating team discovered semen in her vagina and decided her "escape" had been a setup. The sergeant was demoted and reassigned to Camp 14.

Inmates fear the dogs like death itself. The dogs are trained to kill and do so without mercy. Inmates flee for their lives when a guard with a canine partner approaches. The camp guards keep 5~6 dogs at each guard post to use in running down escaping inmates. Regulations stipulate dogs used for such duties must be military animals, but hunting dogs are trained for the job because military animals are very scarce.

Maybe it's the dogs' training, but whatever the reason they do not bother camp guards, MSS personnel, or their dependents. When an inmate appears, however, the dogs immediately become agitated and display unrestrainedly aggressive behavior. Mr. An tells of instances in which the dogs killed inmates.

"The dogs killed two women inmates at Camp 13 in July 1988. They consumed all the women's flesh, leaving nothing but bones. I was right there and saw it all. The MSS fed two 15-year old boys to the dogs in May 1991. It is considered nothing to feed an inmate to the dogs."

Mr. An told me of another instance of complete disregard for human life during a May 1993 fire at Camp 22's coal mine. "A fierce fire broke out at the mine. Some inmates assigned to the mine got out when the fire started, but dozens were trapped inside. The MSS supervisor of mine operations directed that a charge be set off at the mouth of the mine in an attempt to snuff out the fire. The inmates refused, reminding the MSS man of the inmates still trapped inside. The MSS fired blank rounds, to break up the group. They set off the charge, and the flames did stop, but 50 inmates were inside the mine at the time, and none survived."

Inmates frequently die merely to preserve the honor of camp guards or the MSS. In October 1993 Camp 22's Camp Guard Force unit, of which An Myong-chol was a member, received the coveted "Three Revolutions Red Flag" award. Mr. An said his unit won the honor based on the number of bodies of many dead inmates.

"The cultural revolution segment of the Three Revolutions program contains a section calling for well-groomed guard posts. In a bid to win program honors, the Camp Guard Force's leaders from May to October 1993 mobilized inmates to tear down and rebuild every important guard post in Camp 22. Twenty inmates lost their lives in the process." During this project, the guard unit fed the inmates a lunch concocted of spoiled tomatoes, pork bones, and even a little rice.

The guards laughed and hooted as they watched the inmates fight each other viciously to get to the broth and its pork bones and pitifully few grains of rice. The inmates lapped up the stuff ravenously because it was so superior to their usual lunch of steamed corn kernels. The Executioners: The MSS 3rd Bureau

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[SHOCKING REPORT] Political Prisoners' Camps in North Korea (4/10)

Smoke from the 3rd Bureau's Chimney

Hitler created a living hell during World War ¥±, exterminating millions of jews and leaving a barbaric scar on the history of civilization. Last year Steven

Spielberg's "Shindler's List" recalled the horror of those years to viewers' minds, shocking us but at the same time sounding a warning bell. How must we react when we learn that North Korea's internment camps are repeating the same kind of extermination?

An Myong-chol's account informs us that the 3rd Bureau, MSS, is a unit of murderers no different from those who operated at Auschwitz. The 3rd Bureau is also called the Preliminary Adjudication Bureau. The 7th Bureau, MSS, operates North Korea's internment camps, but Mr. An says the 3rd Bureau operates a station at each camp. Third Bureau personnel conduct executions, research torture technology, experiment on living inmates, gather oil from human beings, and commit other depredations.

ï°The 3rd Bureau's Camp 13 station was located at Chukgigol in 1984. It moved for a short time to Camp 16 but returned in 1986 to Camp 13. When Camp 13 was disbanded, the station returned to Camp 16 in May 1990.

Mr. An began to learn of the existence of the 3rd Bureau in October 1987 when he was assigned to a Camp 13 guard post. He was in charge of Tokgol Sub-guardpost, south of Salbau Guard Post. He heard the following conversation while on duty with Squad Leader Sergeant Pak Nam, then 26; Work Team Chief Yi Ui-song, then 24; and Senior Private Kim Chol-man, then 20.

Human Oil for Cosmetics?

Yi Ui-song: Comrade Sergeant. Yesterday mornign I saw smoke billowing out of the 3rd Bureau's building. Is it ture the 3rd Bureau kills inmates and gathers their fat?

Pak Nam: When the 3rd Bureau moved over to Camp 16, I was on patrol near Panhannyong and went into a 3rd Bureau tunnel at Chukgigol. The place reeked of blood, and the tunnel walls were stained with blood and plastered with patches of human hair. It was so terrible I couldn't sleep that night. the smoke you saw was the 3rd Bureau burning the bones of camp

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offenders from whom they already have rendered the oil. You're in big trouble if you dare to open your mouth about the 3rd Bureau. Be careful. You never know when those guys will put a bullet through the back of your head.

Yi Ui-song: How do they extract oil from human beings? What could you do with human oil if you obtained it?

Pak Nam: I've heard they throw people live into boiling water in a big pot. When they're boiled, they strip off the fat and render it like pork fat. I heard Hitler gathered human fat in World War II and used the oil to make cosmetics. I think that's how the 3rd Bureau uses it.

In early 1988, An Myong-chol was assigned to battalion headquarters. One morning in early May of that year, he was pulling duty at the guard post located at the battalion's front gate. He had an unrestricted view of the 3rd Bureau's station at Chukgigol from the guard post.

At about 2:30 am he was thinking of home and counting stars when black smoke began to spew from the station's chimney. Mr. An was startled because he immediately recalled what Pak Nam had told Yi Ui-song. When he got off duty, he reported the smoke to the guard post commander, who said, "You're new, and it looks like you don't know anything. That smoke's from burning human bones. That's you need to know."

Almost all the camp guards had seen the smoke from the burning bones while standing guard duty in the early hours of the morning. An Myong-chol began to learn detail about the 3rd Bureau after he was assigned to temporary duty as a driver in 1989. Drivers deliver rations and other material throughout the camp and develop a broad range of contacts among work group directors and other MSS personnel. In his many trips and visits through the camp, he heard many accounts of the grisly activities of the 3rd bureau from senior MSS and senior camp guard personnel.

In the fall of 1989, Mr. An had to stop frequently at the motor pool to have a vehicle problem looked at. The Transportation Section was responsible for all camp vehicles, and a vehicle belonging to the 3rd Bureau stopped by for repairs while he was there.

Mr. An was smoking and chatting with Yi Myong-hak (then driver for director of the camp's Political Department and now a fuel tank guard at Camp 22's Transportation Section), a driver from the camp's Raw Materials Section, and a driver from the Rear Area Section. Two drivers from the 3rd Bureau and the Security Section Chief had driven up.

Yi Myong-hak stared at the men from the 3rd Bureau and said, "Man, I mean those guys are real lucky. I hear they get gifts every month from Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il. They can go anywhere they want without being challenged; they can have any woman they want. Man, that's living!"

꺇°Crows" Take Away the Inmates

That remark triggered a flood of furtive talk among the group. Mr. An recalled what he heard that day and what he heard from many sources over time around the camp. Ordinarily, the longer a rumor circulates the more overblown it tends to become. We cannot rule out the

possibility, therefore, that what he heard from others in the camp may be exaggerated. Despite this drawback, his statements at least provide us with solid information that the 3rd Bureau exists and provides at least a dim outline of the organization.

ì°When you throw people into boiling water in a big pot, they thrash about terribly for a while but grow quiet within five minutes."

ì°When you sever a human's wrist or heel with a knife, white tendons appear. You can pull these out with pliers, dry them, and use them to make a swagger stick of exceptional toughness."

ì°I heard Hitler in World War ¥± slept in a bed made out of living people. That's supposed to be the best possible way to get a really sound, refreshing night's sleep. The third Bureau sadists mimic Hitler by sleeping in beds made of people. You tie inmates' legs, arms, and necks and spread blankets over them, and it makes the best possible bed.

ì°They tied a man and a woman upside down and cut their carotid arteries, letting the blood spill out to see whether men or women have more blood. They starved men and women to see which sex could last longer without food.

ì°They researched how people reacted to blows to vital areas. They made a tonic out of human uteruses. It is taken by injection and is great for sexual stamina. I heard they provided it as a gift to Kim Jong-il.

ì°The MSS 3rd bureau are human butchers. When they have an inmate ready, they drink the booze Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il send them before they get started. Once they start they are masters of their craft. They don't bat an eye."

ì°They tested the effect of using a rubber hammer on a human. They found if you hit a person with a rubber-headed hammer on the back of the skull, it paralyzes brain function, causes memory loss, and exxentially turns the person into a vegetable. They also tested the strength of a blow necessary to cause death. I heard they let Special Operations military units use some inmates assigned to Major Construction Projects for firing practice and for practice in stealthy, hand-to hand murder."

Mr. An says that when the 3rd Bureau needs people, a five ton Zil truck roars into camp. The truck is covered in canvas to frustrate prying eyes, but has a small window toward the front. The truck does not have a license plate and is painted black. Camp inmates call it the "crow," and the words the crow is coming throws inmates to work on the Major Construction Projects. Actually crows always came in pairs, meaning that each month the trucks haul away 40~60 people.

ì°Major Construction Projects refers to secret tunnels or underground nuclear facilities, but nobody knows where the crows take these inmates."

Kang Chol-hwan was interned at Camp 15 but had never heard of the 3rd Bureau. He did say, "Once a month a five ton Russian truck would take people to work on the Major construction Projects." Kang's description of the truck and use of the term, "Major

Construction Projects" matches An's account. Both said nobody taken away in the trucks ever returned. Kang explained it this way.

꺆°A black truck would appear regularly in the early morning hours, load up with inmates, and drive away. Rumor had it the truck returned inmates to the outside world. When they freed an inmate in the Ideological Indoctrination Area, you had to attend a little ceremony in which camp officials announced you had been cleared and could return to the outside world. The people taken away in the trucks had not gone through this procedure, so we didn't believe the rumor about release. We thought they were being hauled a way to the Maximum Security Area or being mobilized to work on Major Construction Projects."

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[SHOCKING REPORT] Political Prisoners' Camps in North Korea (5/10)

The 3rd Bureau Operates in Strictest Secrecy

After the 3rd Bureau's station moved to Camp 16 in May 1990, an Myong-chol, his friend Ham ki-hung, and three other camp guards were assigned to remove the barbed wire from the station's now empty under ground bunker. The station's perimeter guard post had been torn down; only a few bricks remained.

The same was true of the mokestack, a machine-gun tower, and the station's headquarters itself, which had comprised two buildings a kilometer from the perimeter guard post. All had been destroyed. The guards found the entrances to two tunnels a kilometer farther down the valley.

꺆°The tunnel entrance had been destroyed and covered up with earth to within about 20 inches of the top. I wanted to see what was inside, so I tried to crawl through the space. I had gone barely six inches when I realized the tunnel had collapsed, and I could go no farther. The place reeked of blood and gunpowder, and I staggered back, retching."

The camp guards and even the regular MSS are afraid of the 3rd Bureau's station and are very guarded even about mentioning it, as well they might be in view of rumors the 3rd Bureau kills those who become privy to their operations.

Members of Section 1 (Security) of the camp's Security Department are aware of the 3rd Bureau's existence and some of its activities because the section's personnel typically serve extended tours of duty, but Mr. An said First Section MSS personnel are careful to say as little as possible about the 3rd bureau. The 3rd Bureau maintains very tight security, and Mr. An has little information about it. He said, "All 3rd Bureau people are majors or above and wear civilian clothes in peacetime.

Their uniforms are identical to those of other MSS personnel assigned to the camps, so they cannot be identified by distinctive uniforms. Those assigned to the 3rd Bureau are graduates of The MSS Political College and have studied torture or experiments on live humans."

The Mss and Camp Guards Control the Gulag Valuable Tools to Support Regime The MSS operate North Korea's internment camps, and the Camp Guard Force provides security in the camps. The MSS and the camp guards, then, are directly responsible for the complete absence of human rights in the Gulag.

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Do they really have the authority to treat the inmates inhumanely, even to kill them? An Myong-chol said, "You'd understand if you could see the situation in the camps." The MSS are the center of the camps. MSS personnel are carefully selected for ideological purity and strong loyalty to the Party.

MSS personnel selected to serve in camps for political prisoners are chosen on the basis of their "pure class rating and strong socialist foundation."

Mr. An said 400 MSS personnel and 560 camp guards handle Camp 22. MSS personnel, military personnel, camp guards, and their dependents bring Camp 22's total official complement to around 10,000. He said Camp 13 had about 200 MSS personnel, 300 guards, and 1,500 dependents.

°The MSS personnel," he said, "have the 'finest' socialist foundations in North Korea. They're loyal to Kim Il-sung and Kim Jeong-il, even worshipful, and they're vicious communists." He made the following points about standards for selection to serve in the MSS or in the Camp Guard Force.

To be selected, one must be the descendant of a man who fought in the guerrilla war against the Japanese, the descendant of a man who served as a policeman during the Korean War, the child or close relative of a man who presently serves in the MSS, the child of a person who serves now or who has served in the past at a MSS internment camp, the child or close relative of a MSS person who died while serving at an internment camp, a person who served as a camp guard at an internment camp while completing his military obligation and who then graduates from the MSS Political College and is assigned as a MSS member to serve at an internment camp; a person who serves as an officer in the camp guard and who leaves the service and transfers to the MSS; or a person fulfilling his military duty as a camp guard whom the MSS decide it likes. The MSS have such people transferred to the MSS.

MSS personnel receive extraordinarily preferential treatment because they are responsible for managing the camps, which are regarded as top secret in North Korea. Most MSS personnel are in their 40s and 50s, and they retire at age 60. Even after they retire, they belong to the select "600-60 class," persons who receive 600 grams of food ration per day and a 60 won stipend per month. There is a "dependent village" in each camp for the families of MSS personnel, camp guards, and military officers. The dependent villages are on a different planet from the camp proper, like a heaven in the center of a death camp.

Heaven and Hell inside the Same Fence

The MSS personnel's life style is equivalent to that of the rank of cadre or above. They have beef on the table every day, and their rations include precious seafood like octopus and shark twice a month. On holidays they each get 11 pounds of pork, one chicken, one duck, 20 eggs, 2.4 pints of beer, one pint of stronger alcoholic beverage, sugar, candy, various vegetables, watermelon, and other sweet melongs.

Mr. An noted, "The MSS personnel eat so well they have overweight problems like the people in South Korea." The camp commander and the political department director live in freestanding, 5-room houses. MSS personnel and guards with families live in three-room

duplexes with indoor bathing facilities. It is common for one home to have two or three color television sets, and they all have the "ojang, yukgi," (5 chests, 6 machines) desired by all North Koreans: a dresser, a blanket chest, a side dish cupboard, a wardrobe, and a desk: a television set, refrigerator, tape recorder, camera, washing machine, and sewing machine.

They live sumptuous daily lives. Their monthly salary is higher than MSS personnel who do not serve at the internment camps. A MSS major in a regular unit receives a total of about 250 won, counting their zone allowance. The extra money is the price of silence. Rice produced at the camps is not supplied to the state but is consumed by the MSS personnel on site. The MSS personnel can use as they please any other product of the camps, although only after the state's quota is met. Mr. An said these extra benefits motivate them to "commit horrible things without the slightest pang of conscience."

The MSS: Modern-day Landlords

Examining this information on the camp MSS, it becomes obvious they are to this century what nobles were to feudal times. Their life style is so sumptuous even the camp guards call them "Modern-day Landlords" behind their backs.

"The camps are living hells for the inmates, but they are heaven on earth for the MSS," says An Myong-chol. "They drink booze every night and lead a very happy life. Out in the work zones, they have the inmates wash their hands, wash their feet, trim their fingernails, cut their toenails. They see the inmates as MSS slaves." The Camp Guard force comes in for its own share of perquisites.

Camp guards enjoy guaranteed futures. They can expect to be assigned to attractive civilian jobs. Camp Guard Force noncommissioned officers serve for 10 years, each is allowed to join the Party when he leaves the service, and more than 60% are allowed to attend college. They are assigned to the MSS's Political College when they graduate from the university. When they finish there, they win MSS commissions and return to serve in the Gulag.

Those who complete mandatory military service in the Camp Guard Force but who cannot go on to college or who cannot qualify for a military commission are assigned as laborers at one of the MSS's Pyongyang construction sites. This is a prized assignment because it includes the coveted right to live in Pyongyang.

Camp guards receive superior food rations. The enlisted men call field grade officers "gourmets" because they eat so well. The guards receive a weekly ration of vegetables and meat produced at the camp. They swap coal produced in the forced-labor mine for delicacies like fish and manage to eat high quality food.

The camp guards' food ration, however, is limited in quantity. When North Korea's overall food shortage worsened sharply in 1992, enlisted camp guards were reduced to eating corn porridge and were so hungry they stole from war reserve supplies. Theft of these supplies is a capital crime, which suggests the seriousness of the food shortage.

The MSS and camp guards are heavily armed, both to guard the inmates and to defend the camps against outside attack. MSS personnel and military officers carry pistols, while

enlisted camp guards are armed with AK 58 and AK 68 rifles. Camp 22's armory contains 500 pistols, 1,000 AK rifles, eight four-barrel 14.5mm anti-aircraft machine-guns, and eight heavy machineguns. The camp guards train heavily in air defense to be prepared against airborne attacks by South Korea's Special Warfare Command(SWC).

Camp 22 possesses 20 jeeps and 50 trucks. As a driver, Mr. An is well informed about vehicles. Some of the vehicles run on charcoal, but he said they lack power. "The charcoal trucks are no good at all. They break down all the time and have very little power. You can walk faster than they can go up a hill. The thing is, you can relax when you drive them because you don't have to worry about fuel all the time. The trucks burn oak, pine cones, and corn cobs."

The wood-burning trucks are used mostly for rear area missions, like hauling provisions to guard posts, while trucks for operational purposes, which burn oil products, are used only in emergencies. As North Korea's general oil shortage worsened, Mr. An said, the camps converted equipment to burn wood rather than petroleum, including machines like the tractors and power cultivators used by the inmates in their work.

Mr. An said the camp guards train to handle inmates in case of war or a serious situation similar to war. In such an event, the guards are to move the inmates into tunnels in the coal mine. If the situation remains favorable, the inmates will return to work, but the guards are trained to shoot the inmates or bury them alive in the tunnels if the situation deteriorates.

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[SHOCKING REPORT] Political Prisoners' Camps in North Korea (6/10)

Guards Who Empathize with Inmates

The camps have two schools, one for inmates' children and one for the dependents of the MSS, military officers, and camp guards. The school for inmates' children consists of a four-year primary school and a five-year middle school. Children enter school at age six and finish at 14.

MSS personnel operate the inmates' schools, Children enter school at age six and finish at 14. Miss personnel operate the inmates' ate the inmates'schools, wear pistols during class, and speak harshly to the students, routinely calling them "reactuibart vastards," The school curriculum is limited to physical education, the revolutionary history of Kim Il--sung, writing Korean, and arithmetic.

School starts at 8am and lets out at 4pm, when most pupils are required to work at construction sites, where they remove rocks, or in the fields, where they pick red peppers. The pupils use A-frame back packs for this work, and the A-frames usually are taller than the children. Pupils are well accustomed to arduous labor by the time they graduate and are assigned either to the coal mine or to the fields. There were about 200 inmate students at Camp 22 at one time, Mr. An says, but they die often, and their number has dwindled gradually.

The camp's dependent school system consists of four years of primary school and six years of middle school. The schools facilities are exceptional, so good, in fact, the school boasts that its facilities are on a par with those at Pyongyang's Cheil Middle High School. Classrooms have VTRs;the school has shower facilities, a physical training room, and a cultural center. When dependent children reach draft age, they enlist in the MSS or Camp Guard Force and return to work in the Gulag.

An Myong-chol was a junior sergeant when he defected but should have been a senior sergeant In 1992 it was revealed that Mr. An had given food and shoes to an inmate, and Mr. An came close to being blackballed for life. He bribed a military officer, however, and managed to avoid that fate. He could not escape the "impure ideology" label, however, and this blocked his blocked his promotion. Bribery and corruption are common in the camps.

Mr. An says the corruption reaches extremes at a camp's Political Department, which is

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responsible for detecting local MSS corruption, and among the personnel of the MSS's 7th Bureau, to which the camps report.

The Political Department monitors the ideology of MSS personnel and camp guards and checks for corruption, monitoring whether guards or MSS personnel divert rations, money, or materiel belonging to the inmates. The Political Department checks for evidence of capitalistic behavior and undertakes to ensure the camp's personnel do not have sex with the inmates. Political Department works themselves, however, accept bribes as a matter of course to overlook instances of corruption they uncover. Only offenders who fail to bribe the Political Department or whose actions trigger notoriety are subject to dismissal or to a "class change" that blocks all paths to a desirable future.

Mr. An said, "The Political Department workers abuse their authority, committing the most despicable of actions. Good examples are Han Tae-son, the political guidance officer of the Camp 22 Guard Force Battalion, and a lieutenant colonel whose name I can't remember but who served as the culture guidance officer of Camp 22's Political Department. A May 1994 inspection by a team from the Political Department. A May 1994 inspection by a team from the Political Department of the MSS's 7th Bureau revealed that between them, these two had accepted at least 100,000 won in bribes from camp guards and MSS personnel and had sex with 70 inmates.

Inmates Are Human, Too

The 7th Bureau headquarters is as corrupt as everywhere else. Its inspection and audit team visits the camp before major holidays, and camp officials refer to these as "materiel procurement" visits, and so they are.

The teams leave the camp with 20 times more baggage than they had when they arrived. Between inspections, the camp maintains a steady stream of gifts to the 7th Bureau inspectors, who are willing to close their eyes to infractions they find during audits and inspections only if they are satisfied with the value of their bribes. Ambitious MSS camp personnel can hope for awards or promotions only if the 7th Bureau personnel view them favorably.

Mr. An believes the strict, hierarchical control mechanism and the system of bribery that pervades the official lives of the MSS and guards at the camps inflames their baser instincts. They cannot change the system, so why not go along? Similarly, MSS personnel and camp guards help exterminate human beings, sharing in the camps' brutality. This quickly convinces them that human nature is debased. Moreover, the guards' training teaches them that inmates are inhuman scum. Mr. An explained the change that occurred in his own psychology. "I saw the inmates as subhuman for my first three years in the camps, and then I became a driver and began to get around. The resulting contacts with the inmates caused me to realize my training was flat wrong."

An Myong-chol was taught during basic training that inmates are "class enemies." He seethed with animosity toward them. He himself was cruel to the inmates, striking or otherwise punishing them for no reason. As the years passed and he accumulated more experience in dealing with the inmates, his animus turned to compassion.

Much of Mr. An's reformation of perception happened at Camp 13. Two inmates named Kim Pok-nam worked at the camp's motor pool. One, a mechanic, was quite elderly, yet when he dealt with Mr. An about repairing or cleaning a vehicle, Kim never failed to address Mr. An as "Respected Teacher," a signally high form of address for the 19-year-old. Mr. An said it was Kim's courtesy that caused him to realize the inmates are human beings no different from himself.

Mr. An experienced serious mental conflict as he traveled around the camp and contacted an increasing number of inmates. His training as a guard told him the inmates were subhuman, but his experience as a driver was teaching him the opposite. Camp guards who serve all their time at guard posts and do not get to know the inmates finish their conscription and leave the service full of hatred for the inmates. Mr. An said that for him, however, mental conflict turned to doubt as he contrasted the reality of the camp - the dead were left for wild animals, for example - with Kim Jong-il's idealistic phrases in the Rodong Shinmun - "Let us set our foundations on the people and flourish in our style of socialism."

"I was confused every time I saw in the Rodong Shinmun (newspaper) that North Korea demanded that South Korea release a prisoner of conscience or a longtime communist prisoner who refused to be dissuaded from his communist ideology. I couldn't deal with the deceit."

"I was in a North Korean internment camp where as guards we could kill an inmate out of sheer boredom. Yet I'd read in North Korea's biggest newspaper that North Korea "demanded" that South Korea release unrepentant communist inmates or prisoners of conscience. North Korea doesn't release anybody."

In 1993, South Korea repatriated just such a longtime communist inmate, Yi In-mo. Shortly thereafter the camp guards watched a play based on Yi's life, "The People and Fate." Mr. An said he watched the play but had to shake his head in disbelief. "Yi was lucky to survive and lucky to be released."

The play reveals that just before repatriation he presented gifts to his old communist comrades in South Korea. It is a miracle a person put in prison can survive and even be released, but where in hell can a prisoner ever get enough money to give presents to people?" The play showed Yi In-mo in a South Korean prison, where he was reduced to catching and consuming rats, and where he was beaten until he was crippled. Camp guards who had seen Gulag inmates fight for the right to eat a rat found the play to be naive.

They could not take it seriously and laughed and giggled throughout the presentation.

A number of camp guards furtively gave inmates gifts of corn, clothing, or pork porridge (con gruel with flecks of pork in it). In a move to halt such "class deviation," the Camp Guard Force leadership began daily training sessions, the major thrust of which follows. "You must not view the inmates as human beings. You are authorized to strike the inmates, not to talk to them. If you don't kill inmates, you will die. The inmates wait and watch all the time for an opportunity to kill you." The instructors insisted the guards not speak to inmates. "Hey! If you talk to one, you're treating him like a human being. You must remember they are of the animal class. Treat them that way."

Training Inflames Hatred for Inmates

In political ideology training sessions, the guards learned, "The inmates are like time bombs, but you don't know when they will explode. Give them a chance and they will riot. All they think about is murdering MSS personnel and camp guards." In point of fact, some inmates were executed when they were found to be making weapons with which to kill MSS or guard personnel.

During a training session, the Security Section Chief showed the guards artifacts which had been confiscated from inmates, including axes and knives, the South Korean national flag, the United States national flag, medals presented by the Japanese emperor, Japanese swords, and land deeds dating from the pre-communist era.

This ploy heightened the guards' animosity toward the inmates. Mr. An said the guards are ordered repeatedly during training to be careful of female inmates. The instructors say there have been cases in which a female inmate pretended to surrender her body to a guard but then stole his weapon, killed him with it, and escaped from camp. Beware of women inmates, they are told.

The Security Section Chief told us during training, 'Ninety percent of the inmates are just waiting for a chance to get you.' He said 50% harbor ideas of killing MSS personnel or camp guards and making good an escape. Another 40%, he said, await the day when South Korean or American forces surge into the camp and liberate them. Only 10% want to be cooperative with the MSS and live out their lives without trouble. This 10% provides inmates leadership, like work group foreman, team guides, night monitors, and work site foremen.

The MSS tightly organizes the inmates to ensure control of those with hostile attitudes and to squeeze from inmates the last ounce of physical labor. Two MSS personnel from Section 2 (Production) of the camp's Security Department are assigned to each of the camp's zone work groups. These men select supervisory inmates and manage things through these assistants.

The inmate titles in this hierarchy follow. Zone work groups and plant work groups have a forman, assistant foreman, guide, night monitor, people's foreman, and work team chiefs. Work groups directly subordinate to the region have inmate managers and inmate product managers. The administration committee has an inmate manager-in-charge of zone, plant, and regional work groups.

Mr. An says virtually all top inmate leaders are women. Most sleep with the MSS and are flattering sycophants willing to accept favors. They spy pitilessly on their fellow inmates. Inmates who show loyalty to the MSS get a few more material advantages and are assigned to less strenuous work details.

Camp rules stipulate inmate must remain in groups of five when traveling from the billeting area to their work area and, in fact, when conducting any activity. Two of every five are MSS spies. Armed MSS personnel accompany the teams when they go into mountainous areas to get wood or gather wild vegetables for side dishes. The MSS inform the camp guards in advance of such activities, and guards from the nearest guard post increase patrolling, hide along the perimeter fence, and otherwise boost security in the area.

The camp curfew extends from 10pm to 5am, and night monitors check by work group to ensure workers are in bed, although not, of course, in the coal mines. A special patrol of camp guards also checks to be sure no one moves around during curfew hours. Patrol members enter every inmate billet in the camp at least once during curfew hours.

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[SHOCKING REPORT] Political Prisoners' Camps in North Korea (7/10)

Security Is Life

When an inmate escapes, kills somebody, or otherwise commits a serious infraction of camp regulations, the inmates himself is punished, of course, but so also are those inmate leaders responsible for the offender, including his work group foreman, guide, night monitor, and even the MSS spy or spies assigned to watch him.

The MSS haul them to the detention barracks or reassign them to the coal mine. MSS personnel debrief their spies every day, and if they detect anything strange, they arrest the inmate involved and send him to the detention barracks. Spies who don't maintain a flow of information or who don't exert sufficient influence on the inmates to prevent an escape, a murder, or complaints and discontent are assigned to do disciplinary labor in the deepest tunnels in the coal mine. The MSS, on the other hand, bestow gifts of clothin and relatively easy work assignments on productive spies. The spies live a doubly ugly life, spying and rattng on fellow victims.

The Gulag's surveillance networks are so intricately organized that MSS personnel learn almost immediately from their snitches about a camp guard who tries to obtain a little "freedom." "Freedom" excursions involve a camp guard's doing things like stealing anything interesting from storage sheds or absenting himself from a guard ost to prowl around looking for someone to force into having sex.

Security causes more anxiety among guards and MSS personnel than any other item. The existence of the camps is regarded as North Korea's most important secret because revealing the existence of the North Korean Gulag would undermine the "dignity" of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il. Posters cover the walls of every non-inmate building in camp, reminding the MSS and guards alike that, "Security is life." One cannot be too attentive to security.

Security is drilled so incessantly into the MSS and the guards that they guard every conversation. So serious is the security issue that a military officer accompanies everyone who departs the camp on leave or temporary duty. In principle, guard personnel are not allowed to take leave, although leave is granted if one's mother or father dies.

When a Camp Guard Force soldier completes his cenlistment and goes on to college, he is required to report to the MSS officer in Charge at the university, thus accepting continued

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Chongjin, North Hamgyong Province. Mr An says a total of about 200,000 persons are incarcerated in the camps.

Observers in South Korea believe North Korea operates at least 10 internment camps. Did North Korea cut the number in half in a move to improve its human rights record? I put that question to An Myong-chol, who said no, North Korea merely consolidated the camps as a security move because their existence had become widely known. He says North Korea has no motivation whatever to improve human rights.

The 7th Bureau operated 10 internment camps until about 1990. The following camps were closed at the indicated times, and the 7th Bureau assigned their inmates to other camps: Camp 11 (Kyongsong, North Hamgyong Province) closed in October 1989; Camp 12 (Onsong and Changpyong, Rodongja-gu, North Hamgyong Province), closed in May 1987; Camp 13 (Chongsong-gu, Onsong-gun, North Hamgyong Province), closed in December 1990; Camp 26 (Hwachon-dong, Sungho-ri, Pyongyang), closed in January 1991; and Camp 27 (Chonma, North Pyongan Province), closed in November 1990.

Mr. An says 20,000 inmates were incarcerated at Camp 13 and about 50,000 at Camp 22 when he was stationed at those camps with the Camp Guard Force. To disguise their identity, the camps are formally designated as units of the Chosun People's Security Unit 2209; Paeksan-gu MSS; and Administrative Center Number 22.

The camps are located in remote, mountainous areas in provinces far from the DMZ, Jagang, Yanggang, and North and South Hamgyong. The remoteness of the sites is designed to maintain security, to be safe from the South Korean Special Warfare Command (SWC), and to make escape difficult.

Sources say the MSS 7th Bureau is not the only MSS bureau to operate internment camps for political prisoners. These sources say camps operated by other bureaus exist at the following locations: Fukdonh snf Fsnvhon in South Hamgyong Province, Bookchang in South Pyongan Province, Chonma in North Pyongan Province and Dongshing in Jagangdo. An Mtibg-chol says he has "no information" about camps operated by MSS bureaus other than the 7th.

Three Generations Incarcerated at Once

Mr. An says North Korea began to build facilities to accommodate groups of political prisoners in the late 1950s. When Kim Il-sung purged competitors in the Yonan Faction, the Soviet Faction, and the Domestic Faction, he had a total of three generations of the victims' immediate families isolated from society. The purges were large in scale, and many people were banished to secluded mountain areas. Mr. An says trains carried away a thousand people at a time during the Yonan Faction purge, when Kim Chang-pong was purged in 1969, and when Kim Pyong-ha was purged. (This reportedly occurred in the early 1980s, and many or most MSS personnel were purged with Kim Pyongha and sent en masse to internment camps.)

Initially, internment camps were situated in mountainous hinterlands and configured as mass

camps for "anti-revolutionary elements." The first camps were demarcated by simple wooden fences, and little other effort went into security. Inmates frequently escaped, large-scale rioting occurred, and the regime cracked down, boosting security and tightening control at the camps. Control was enhanced in the late 1960s by assigning inmates to specific zones. The MSS handled guard duties until 1968, when this function was transferred to the highly-trained Camp Guard Force.

North Korea operates internment camps as a means of population control. The North Korean people know, "If you err only one time in your speech, you kill three generations of your family." Thus, North Korea's camps are not designed as passive facilities to imprison those who are discontented with the regime. They are essential mechanisms of active oppression which contribute to preserving Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il in power.

The Kims deliberately adopted the practices of the absolute monarchs of Korea's dynastic past by punishing three generations of a family for the miscue of a single person. The Kims rule by fear. (Note: The Korean language expresses this dynastic past by punishing three generations of a family for the miscue of a single person. The Kims rule by fear. (Note: The Korean language expresses this dynastic practice in a single word, yonjwa, "to be punished because of kinship with an offender.")

The North Korean approach is no different from that of the Nazis in world War II when they strove to eradicate the Jews by sending to the camps entire families - adults, children, the aged, everybody. The North Korean people do not question the practice of incarcerating the family of an offender. An Myong-chol has personally witnessed three generations of one family - a grandfather, father, and son - all confined in a North Korean camp. One example of this practice is Kang Chol-hwan, who escaped from Camp 15's Ideological Indoctrination Area and then defected to South Korea. Kang was sent to the camp because his grandfather deviated. Reports suggest that a camp inmate often has brothers under incarceration, suggesting that North Korean yonjwa may extend beyond lineal kin. Recent cases suggest, however, that North Korea's ironclad yonjwa system of family incarceration may be changing.

We asked An Myong-chol about this. "Not only is yonjwa barbarous," he said, "but it causes a geometric rise in inmate numbers. North Korea, meanwhile, has closed a number of camps and faces limitations on the number of new inmates who can be accommodated." Mr. An said that Camp 22 is so full there is no space to put more inmates.

Lately, then, if a husband commits an offense but his wife has served the Party energetically, the wife is given a choice of divorcing her husband or following him to an internment camp. If she chooses divorce, only the husband is sent to a camp; his family avoids what is tantamount to a death sentence. Mr. An says some women in this situation do choose divorce, but a majority elect to follow their husbands to the camps.



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[SHOCKING REPORT] Political Prisoners' Camps in North Korea (8/10)

Even a Corpse Cannot Escape From the Camps

Mr. An says the application of the yonjwa family punishment system to North Korean political prisoners originated from a directive issued by Kim Il-sung to "exterminate three generatios" of political criminals.Mr. An says Kim issued this directive to the MSS in 1958 when he purged members of the Yonan, Soviet, and Domestic Factions.

An Myong-chol says Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il issued a number of directives about political criminals while he served in the Camp Guard Force. Guards are required to memorize these directives during a monthly "Know the Directives Hour." Various Kim directives are posted in the offices, and bulletin boards.

A revies of two of the Kims' directives makes it abundantly clear what Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il think of political prisoners. "Inmates are class enemies and must be actively exterminated to three generations." Other directivers suggest that escapes and riots continue to be problems. "Prevent excapes. Surveil perfectly."

When North korea condemns an entire family to the Gulag, it sends the offender to one camp and his family forever. Those who commit offenses are incarcerated at Camps 15 and 25, while their family members are sent to Camps 14, 15, 16, and 22. Camp 15 acc.,pdates both offenders and family members, but they are kept completely separate. Offenders go to the camp's ideological Indoctrination Area. Thus, by any objective measure, only Camps 15 and 25 contain political prisoners. The remaining camps are filled with innocent relatives. It is not accurate to refer to these inmates as criminals or even political criminals.

They may be called accurately "politically incarcerated persons" or "inmates of conscience."(Amnesty International uses these two terms to apply to separate categories of persons imprisoned over a political incident. The organization uses "politically incarcerated persons" to apply to those who support the use of force or who have actually used force in pursuit of their objectives.

Amnesty applies "inmates of conscience" only to those who reject the use of force and in fact have not employed violence. In this article, however, we use "politically incarcerated persons" - or "political prisoners - in the broad sense, not the limited sense used by Amnesty international.)"

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Who Goes to the Extermination Camps?

Political prisoners, as distinct from the family members of political prisoners, inhabit single rooms in the Maximum Security Areas of Camps 15 and 25. The security in these areas is much tighter than at other areas, and living conditions are much harsher. Inmates who are family members of political prisoners live in barracks or as family units at other locations.

An Myong-chol says people who came to North Korea in pursuit of the socialist dream usually are incarcerated at Camps 15 or 26(Sungho-ri, Pyongyang). (Camp 26 inmates were transferred to Camp 25 when the former closed.) Persons kidnapped from other countries are confined at the same two camps. Inmates who are candidates for release are kept in Camp 15's Ideological Indoctrination Area, where they are exposed for a set period to the rigors of camp life. The regime will release eventually only those who show signs they apposite extreme of the spectrum.

Very, very few inmates return from this "killing field." Once an inmate enters that zone, he must suffer hard labor until the day he dies. The Maximum Security Area is a living hell. "When you die, they don't even release your corpse." No exceptions are permitted.

Mr. An says Camp 15 is the only one which is divided into two zones. The others comprise a single maximum Security Area. Camp 15's Ideological Indoctrination Area is the only place an inmate can cherish a hope to return to society alive. It happens infrequently, but sometimes an inmate is reassigned from a Maximum Security Area to the Ideological Indoctrination Area. Kang Chol-hwan told me a such case.

A political prisoner in Camp 14 (a Maximum Security Area) was transferred to Camp 15's Ideological Indoctrination Area. Kang says he witnessed the inmate's joy:

"I'm going to survive! I must be in heaven!" An Myong-chol also says a very small number of inmates in Maximum Security Areas are transferred to Camp 15's Ideological Indoctrination Area.

He says such inmates have no clear-cut charges against them. Why is Camp 15 the only camp which has an Ideological Indoctrination Area? I put that question to Mr. An and Kang. Their answers are given in the following paragraph.

Most of the people confined at Camp 15's Ideological Indoctrination Area are members of North Korea's elite class, or their family members. Inmates there include people North Korea has spent much money to educate and train: family members of people who repatriated to North Korea from Japan and whose relatives include Chosen soren cadre; and people whose popularity with th North Korean people is such that the regime does not choose to execute them.

North Korea sends to the Ideological Indoctrination Area people who irritate the leadership when allowed to live in civilian society, but whose execution the regime would find burdensome. They arrest them, send them to the Ideological Indoctrination Area, and let them sample the rigors of camp life before allowing them back in civilian society.

As an inmate in the camps, you can expect to be confined in a Maximum Security Area unless you have been a member of elite North Korean society. You can expect to face daily the rigors of a place specializing in human extermination.

Who are the people incarcerated in the extermination zones, then? Said Mr. An of inmates brought to the camps, "They're members of the exploitative class, those guilty of treason against the people, religious sectarian elements, spies, reactionary elements, those who have betrayed the fatherland, those to whom the Party assigns a negative social classification, those who try to defect, religious people, and women who worked as kisaeng girls during the Japanese occupation.

Women Are Stronger in Extreme Conditions

The crucial fact about camp inmates is that they have been set on the path to extermination without benefit of due process of law. The decision is entirely arbitrary. Persons in North Korea who commit ordinary crimes like robbery, theft, violence, or murder are tried in the criminal justice system and then incarcerated in correctional facilities administered by the Ministry of Public Security.

MSS officials investigate political prisoners, however, and if the investigators deem charges to be well founded, then MSS officers can decide to imprison the suspect with no recourse whatever to due process. If the political criminal has a family, the MSS decides whether they, too, shall be summarily incarcerated. A political criminal is forbidden any contact with the outside world the moment he enters an internment camp, and he must remain an inmate until he dies.

For family members, it happens suddenly. They are hauled from their homes and thrown into a desolate place of death and have not the slightest idea why. They sob and tremble as they ask, "Why have you dragged us here? We've done nothing wrong." Their answer comes in the form of a sharp blow, mute and unheeding. Family members suffer serious psychological shock when they realize the brutal nature of the camps. Some faint, and some begin to lose their minds. Group suicides are common among inmate families. They hang themselves, jump into a lake, or leap from a cliff.

So complete is the initial depression that family member inmates typically cry themselves to sleep at night. As time passes, depression turns to a consuming rage. Eventually, the rage gives way in most inmates to an instinct for survival that causes them to see camp life as ordinary reality. By that time, the camp has stripped away any scrap of human dignity or morality. Indeed, inmates who preserve any human emotion will find it most difficult to cling to life.

The Gulag dehumanizes the inmates, robbing them of any sense of shame. They think nothing of stripping off their clothes and bathing in front of others. They are no longer human beings, in fact, but slaves, wild animals. Mr. An said everything they do is based on wild, aggressive, animalistic instinct.

At Camps 13 and 22 where Mr. An was stationed, most inmates are men and women in their 30s and 40s who had no opportunity to marry. Women outnumber men three to two. Mr. An said he asked why there were more women and was told one reason is that men are forced to

work the coal mines, which kills or injures them. The main reason, though, is that the instinct for survival is stronger in women.

Mr. An says that in the extreme conditions prevailing in the camps, the women reveal a greater will to survive and are more adaptable to the bitter environment. "The men," he says, "seem unable to draw sufficient nourishment from the sparse camp rations and grow progressively weaker. The women, on the other hand, display much more energy than do the men."

Kang Cho-hwan defected to South Korea after escaping from Camp 15, and his view accords with Mr. An's. Kang says more men than women develop malnourishment on an identical ration of corn. He says the inmates believe corn to be better suited to women, who absorb its nourishment more fully.

Women occupy the top levels of the control organization the MSS organize among the inmates themselves. The MSS put women in charge to exploit their tendency to lord it over others, to enjoy informing, and to snvy others. The MSS, of course, appoint many women to positions of authority over other inmates because the women provide "sexual amusement" in return.

Death Rules Each Day

Mr. An says many inmates survive camp life for 20~30 years. Such people usually die of natural causes at around age 50, worn out and sick from decades of hard labor and malnourishment. By the time they reach age 45, inmates typically suffer from a 90-degree curvature of the back. Mr. An says he believes this is caused by years of hard labor and the common use of the A-frame for transporting material in the camps was a woman age 65. She was bent so double her head almost touched the ground, like an upside down U.

Most of An Myong-chol's account deals with death. He estimates that 5-6 inmates die daily at Camp 22. That's about 150 deaths a month, 1,500~2,000 in a year. Despite these deaths, however, Camp 22's inmate population remains at a constant 50,000, suggesting that 1,500~2,000 new inmates arrive at the camp each year.

Inmates become so enured to death they pay little attention to it unless a family member dies. Inmates seldom know-or care-who dies. When an inmates commits suicide or dies in an accident, the Mss lodge a charge of insurrection against his relatives on the grounds the "decedent" failed to pay his full penalty because he met an early death. Thus, a person is an enemy to his family even in death. the camps deny inmates even the right to die.

The charge of insurrection lodged against the close relatives of an inmate who commits suicide or dies in an accident is much more than formal. The surviving family members are required to perform additional labor to compensate for work the decedent would have done. This typically involves reassigning a survivor to disciplinary labor at the coal mine. Accidents are so frequent at the mine that inmates working there are injured or killed almost daily. When several inmates are killed in a serious accident, they are identified and buried together. A joint burial ground is located near the coal mine, but this is unique in the camp. No burial grounds exist in the camp's farming areas.

The dead are buried in places not under cultivation. The graves are not marked by the distinctive Korean mound because the huge number of mounds would symbolize the enormous loss of life at the camps. Indeed, graves are not marked in any way, so family members do not know where loved ones are buried. Inmates are forbidden to cry when a family member dies, and the MSS send those who cry to the detention barracks. The rational is quintessentially North Korean: One must not grieve for a reactionary element.

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[SHOCKING REPORT] Political Prisoners' Camps in North Korea (9/10)

What Do the Inmates Do at the Camps?

Enormous Slave Factories

An Myong-chol says camp inmates are slave laborers. The sole reason the inmates are not killed in the first place is to "squeeze work out of them."

Maximum Security Areas were created to provide inmates the least amount of nourishment required to sustain life while working them like slaves until they die. Said Mr. An, "North Korea exploits its 200,000 inmates to make products it then distributes to the general population. In fact the interment camps produce about 40% of North Korea's farm products, mostly corn, and 40% of its coal."

Each camp specializes in certain products to maximize efficiency. An Myong-chol lists these specialties a follows:

Camp Products

14 farm products, shoes and uniforms for guard and military forces

15 farm products, logs, livestock

16 potatoes, logs, livestock

22 farm products, livestock, coal

25 bicycles, electrical appliances(refrigerators, fans, washing machines) An Myong-chol composed the following list of Camp 22 production quotas. "Camp 22's annual quotas are 400,000 tons of corn; 50,000 tons of limabeans; 10,000 tons of red pepper; and a total of 100,000 tons of pork, beef, duck, chicken, and mutton. In addition, the MSS issue varying quotas each year for Chinese cabbage, radishes, cucumbers, eggplant, and fruits.

The camp provides coal to the Chongjin Thermal Power Plant, the Chongjin Steel Mill, and the Kimchaek Steel Mill. These plants would face serious operational difficulties if deprived of Camp 22's coal. Without that coal, North Korea's steel and electricity production would all but grind to a halt, dealing the economy a mortal blow."

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Camp Farms Are Top Producers

Camp 14 and 22 together in a year produce much more than 100,000 tons of meat for use in P'yongyang by citizens of that city and by foreigners at hotels and in restaurants there. Camp 22 provides 40% of the cob corn and kernel corn supplied annually to the citizens of North and South Hamgyong Provinces. Important products from Camp 16 include potatoes and mine support pillars.

If Camp 16 stopped producing the pillars, production would suffer at coal mines in South Pyongan Province's Anju region, the coal mine at Camp 22, and all the coal mines in North Hamgyong Province.

Ironically, Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il give the refrigerators and Seagull brand bicycles produced at Camp 25 as gratuities to reward special loyalty displayed by North Korean citizens. An Myong-chol gave an interesting explanation for the very serious food shortages now gripping North and South Hamgyong Provinces.

Said Mr. An, "Until 1990, the two Hamgyong Provinces got 60% of their food from the internment camps, corn from Camps 12, 13, and 22; and potatoes from Camps 11 and 16. Due to camp closures since about 1990, however, only Camps 16 and 22 now supply food products to those provinces. This drop in supply started the food shortage in the area, and other factors caused it to worsen."

The camps are not extremely large. They are no bigger than an average South Korean county, so how can they produce so much meat and agricultural products?

Mr. An said, "Until 1990, the two Hamgyong Provinces got 60% of their food from the internment camps, corn from Camps 12, 13, and 22; and potatoes from Camps 11 and 16. Due to camp closures since about 1990, however, only Camps 16 and 22 now supply food products to those provinces. This drop in supply started the food shortage in the area, and other factors caused it to worsen." The camps are not extremely large. They are no bigger than an average South Korean county, so how can they produce so much meat and agricultural products? Mr. An said, "Productivity in the camps is enormously high, much more so than on collective farms or in North Korean work places."

Mr. An explains the difference between farming in the camps and on normal farms. "There is no sense of ownership on an ordinary North Korean farm. A farmer does not view a given field as his. As a result, the farmers don't even care if the ground hardens or sinks. Who can blame them? They get nothing extra for working extra hard."

In the camps, however, the inmates care for the fields with desperate concern. If the MSS spots in a field a single rock or a single weed, the inmate in charge is hauled off to the detention barracks. Camp fields usually occupy mountainous terrain newly claimed for agriculture, ground ordinarily adverse to husbandry.

The camp fields are fertile, however, because the inmates apply humus and compost to them year round. The fields' unit inmates apply humus and compost to them year round. The field's unit productivity vastly exceeds that of ordinary North Korean farms.

Skilled Inmates

Prior to its closing in 1990, Camp 13 produced 500,000 tons of high-temperature lignite each year. After the camp closed, civilian miners managed to produce from the same mine only 100,000 tons of coal. Camps 12 and 13 always produced bumper corn crops. When these camps closed and civilian farmers took over, however, the fields shortly were overrun with weeds. Corn production levels. Party cadres complained to the farmers that the reduced production was resulting in short supply up the chain.

The North Korean economy, then, can ill afford to do without the internment camps' prolific production. The inmates don't get vacations, they don't get seasonal breaks from the fields, and harsh conditions don't halt their labor. Many inmates burrow like moles into the fields. The land and its produce provide them with life's only solace.

If the only purpose in a slave's life is to work like a drudge until death, then camp inmates became particularly skilled, adept drudges. They often invent a new tool to help at the workplace, or improve existing tools, and this boosts productivity. One inmate confined during the 1970s at Camp 13 succeeded in altering a diesel tractor so that it ran on charcoal.

Before long all tractors in all camps were switched over to wood, conserving enormous quantities of precious oil. Mr. An says he heard about the tractor fuel switch from Camp 22's Camp Guard Force commander, Colonel Kang so-nam. Kang is a shrewd person, and Mr. An learned Kang headed the work group at Camp 13's Transportation Section where the inmate managed to switch tractors to charcoal.

Kang reported the accomplishment as his own and received a medal for his trouble. Inmates get a total of nine days off per year: 1 and 2 January(New Year's); 16 February(Kim Jong-il's birthday); 15-16 April(Kim Il-sung's birthday); 27 July(Korean War "Victory Day");15 August(Fatherland Liberation Day);9 September(Government Foundation Day); and 10 October(Party Foundation Day). The inmates are also allowed one volleyball match per year. This is justified on the grounds the inmates need to vent frustration to prevent rioting.

The management has discovered two things to divert the inmates' thoughts from riot and rebellion:money and marriage.

Camp inmates cherish only one desire, to marry. Each year the MSS reward spies and top producers by allowing one or two couples in a camp to marry.

To allow so few among so many to marry is sheer propaganda. Inmates are also paid 500 won per year in cash. They have no place to spend this money, so the MSS and guards extort it from them by selling black market items at raptorial prices. MSS personnel and camp guards charge inmates 50,000 won for old shoes with worn out soles; 10,000 won per kilogram for meat or fish; and 20,000 won for an old wristwatch.



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[SHOCKING REPORT] Political Prisoners' Camps in North Korea (10/10)

Confused by a Fantasy

North Korea continues to claim, "In the Juche People's Republic there is nos such a thing as an internment camp for political criminals." To the outside observer, indeed, camp inmates appear to have the freedom to marry as they choose and appear not to be slave laborers because they receive wages. The camp's children go to school, and the inmates lead a self-sufficient life. Official North Koreans insist, "These people have stores. They play sports. We have no internment camps!"

These claims tend to be believed by South Korea's liberals, who often blindly believe North Korea lives by its own lights, independently, on a foundation of resistance to the Japanese occupation. It makes not sense, some believe, to indoct tje, nu "capitalist standards of human rights."

Even as a debate rages on this issue on this issue in South Korea, however, thousands die each year in North Korea's Gulags. Some starve to death, their bodies left for wild animals to devour. These people are fellow Koreans. These people speak the language we speak; their ancestors are our ancestors.

A South Korean opposition political leader who still dreams of becoming president and who "retired" from politics once invited important figures from around the world to an international forum.

The former politician issued there a statement which, among other things, expressed concern for "the human rights situation in Myanmar" and called for the release of political prisoners in Burma, including North Korean agents who killed South Korean cabinet members in a bomb attack there. He did not mention North Korea's human rights abuses.

The United States ha begun delivering 400,000 tons of Bunker C Oil to North Korea, the price Pyongyang wrung wrung from the Americans for entering into talks on its nuclear program. The South Korean government is falling all over itself to build nuclear reactors for North Korea. One of Sough Korea's largest conglomerates agreed to supply several thousand tons of sugar to Pyongyang as a bribe for per mission to do business in North Korea.

Is there no danger the U.S. oil will be used in the internment camps to make inmates work

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harder? Is there no danger th South Korean nuclear reactors will generate power for the 3,300-volt electric fences that surround the internment camps? Is there no danger the sugar the South Korean conglomerate will give to North Korea will be used as bonuses to stimulate MSS personnel and camp guards to further excesses of loyalty?

The time has come to consider such things. A young defector has rent the veil that hid from our view not only North Korea's internment camps but the formerly impenetrable Maximum Security Areas. We now have clear testimony about the nature of North Korean camps, places where inmates are stripped of humanity and btchered like cattle.

Many a tall mountain and swift river, however, lay between us and our ability to apply this young man's lessons. The reality is that a "North Korean fantasy" grips many in South Korea, and An Myong-chol's account alone will not undermine a fantasy as persistent as this one.

People An Myong-chol Met in the Camps

Kim Song-ho, male, 50, from Pyongyang:Ministry of the People's Armed Forces(MPAF), lieutenant general. Kim was interned during the purge of Kim Chang-pong. Kim worked as head of the Electricity Repair Team in Camp 13's motor pool. He was transferred to Camp 22, where he worked as head of the Repair Team is a camp food factory. Kim was an expert at electrical repair.

Kim Pork-nam, males, 25, from P'yongyang:MSS officer. Kim's father was interned when Kim Pyong-ho was purged. Kim was a vehicle mechanic at Camp 13's motor pool After being transferred to Camp 22, Kim was assigned as a tractor team chief under the direct control of the Raksaeng Zone.

Choe FNU , 28, female, from Pyongyang:Choses father was a cadre in the Central Party, but was interned on suspicion of opposing Kim Jong-il. She was a Work Group Guide in Camp 13's Work Group 19. She became pregnant by the deputy commander of Salbau Guard Post, Camp Guard Force. Her pregnancy became known, and she was executed secretly in 1987.

Pak Kum-nyo, 55, female, from Pyongyang: Pak's husband was a cadre in the Central Party, but was interned on suspicion of being a spy. Pak was a seamstress at Camp 13's motor pool. she was transferred to Camp 16 in December 1990.

Kang FNU, 26, female, from Kosong in Kangwon Province: Kang's father was a MPAF military officer, but was interned after attempting to defect to South Korea. She was a Work Group Guide in Tunnel 5 at Camp 13's coal mine. She attempted to kill a MSS officer in 1989, and was shot dead on the spot.

Jang Sang-chol, male, 30, from Ongjin, Hwanghae Province: Jang's father provided support to South Korean forces entering North Korea during the Korean War. He hid out aftter war ended, but eventually was arrested and interned with all family members. Jang was an engine mechanic in Camp 22's motor pool.

Kim Sang-chol, male, 27, from Pyongsong, South Pyongan Province: Kim's father was a MPAF military officer, but was interned during the purge of Kim Chang-pong, Kim was a

it was learned that ther husband's brother was an officer in the South Korean armed forces. Yi was a construction worker on Camp 22's Farm Construction Work Group.

Wang Kum-pok, female, 35:Wang's father provided support to South Korea forces entering North Korea during the Korean War and was interned when this fact was revealed. Wang was a Work Group Guide at Camp 22's motor pool. She had the "eyes of a snake and the heart of a viper," Mr. An recalled.

Cho FNU, female, 60: Cho's husband served as a township mayor during the Japanese occupation and was interned when this was revealed. The authorities in 1973 searched Cho's home and found a medal from the Japanese emperor and a Japanese sword. She and her three children were secretly executed.

An FNU, female, 65:An's husband owned property before North Korea was founded, and he was interned when this was revealed. The authorities in 1992 searched An's home and found aproperty deed and a South Korean national flag. She and her two daughters were secretly executed.

Son Myong-chun, male, 25:Son's father was interned on suspicion of being opposed to the regime of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il. Son was a Nomsok Region carpenter and skilled maker of furniture.

Ho Yong-sun, female, 27:Ho was a machine operator at the heating plant. She was beautiful, and the MSS took her away and abused her sexually. An Tong-ho, male, 33:An was a driver in Camp 22's motor pool.

Kim Myong-sop, 27, male:Kim was a mechanic in Camp 22's motor pool. Kim was very hot tempered and was beaten every day as a result. He was not executed, however, because he was a superior mechanic.

Om Kwang-ho, male, 25:Om was a driver in Camp 22's Coal Mine motor pool. Om was interned with his father. He was skillful at getting along with people.

Kim Kwang-su, male, 28:Kim was a mechanic at the headquarters motor pool. Kim stuttered.

Yi Song-il, male, 31: Yi was leader of the Electricity Repair Platoon of the Administrative Motor Pool. Yi was an excellent electrician.

Om Tong-kun, male, 35: Om was a mechanic at the headquarters motor pool.

Kim Ho-yong, male, 29: Kim was a driver for the headquaters motor pool.

Kong Chong-won, male, 45: Kong was a Chinese resident of North Koreas. He was chief of the Production Team at the headquarters motor pool. Kong was a master mechanic who was so talented he could build his own generator.

Ham Pok-sun, female, 29: She consorted with the MSS and acted as their spy. She was Work Group Guide for Work Group 1 in Camp 22's Saul Region. Ham had big eyes and a beautiful

face, but she was a mean-spirited woman.

Kim FNU, female, 35: Kim's grandfather reportedly participated with Kim Hyong-chik in the Chosun. People's Society. She was work group guide for Work Group 3 in Camp 22's Saul Region. Kim was a MSS spy and a sexual toy for the MSS. Kim pestered the MSS to get her a novel called, "Dawn Path," which was supposed to mention her grandfather and Kim Hyong-chik.

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