

TATTOOING, TERROR, AND THE AMERICAN SEARCH FOR A “MORAL
VICTORY”: VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION AND THE KOREAN WAR ARMISTICE

By

Lu Sun

Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Vanderbilt University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

History

August, 2014

Nashville, Tennessee

Approved:

Professor Thomas A. Schwartz

Professor Ruth Rogaski

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section	Page
I. Introduction and Literature Review	2
II. Tattooing, Terror, and Voluntary Repatriation Policy	
POWs and a Stalemated War	6
Truman’s Voluntary Repatriation Policy and Psychological Warfare	8
The World-shaking “Koje Incident”	13
Agents of Atrocities and the Battle of the Proxies.....	16
The “Prisoner” of the Prisoners of War	21
Backfire at Home	27
III. Conclusion	29

I. Introduction

On May 18, 1952, a Christian rector, the Reverend Charles W. Lowry, delivered a sermon, “Christianity’s Answer to Communism,” at “The Church of the Presidents,” St. John’s Church in Washington, D.C.¹ He started his sermon by pitting Christianity in America against Marxist Communism in the Soviet Union and China. Then he went on and told a story:

This past week I made an address in New York and was kept answering questions till eleven o’clock. A keen and attractive American girl asked me why it is that our American negotiators at Panmunjom simply sit in dumb fury at the truce talks while the Communist constantly exploit them as a rostrum for propaganda. ‘Why don’t we settle down,’ she asked, ‘and reply in kind, reading from the Declaration of Independence, the Sermon on the Mount, perhaps even from the sayings of Confucius?’ This suggestion impressed me very much and I throw it out, hoping that it may reach the high places in the Pentagon and possibly our Board of Psychological Warfare.²

Exasperating and unbelievably tedious talks at Panmunjom tended to occupy the attention of the home front. As the truce talks at Panmunjom dragged on, not only did the American people grow frustrated about the seemingly endless armistice talks, but the Communist prisoners in the United Nations camps also felt restless, and even initiated several riots to impact the gridlocked truce talks. Meanwhile, plotting and infiltrating, both the United Nations side and the Communist side devised strategies and campaigns to win the hearts and minds of the prisoners. At the highest point of the tug of war in the POW compounds, United Nations Command Brigadier General Francis T. Dodd was seized by his own prisoners as a hostage on May 7, 1952 in Koje Island.

The tortuous Korean armistice negotiation at Panmunjom lasted from July 10, 1951 to July 27, 1953, during which time the Communist delegation, led by North Korean General Nam

¹ Two books were published in one year conveying similar messages. See Charles W. Lowry, *Communism and Christ* (Morehouse-Gorham Co.; 3rd edition; 1953); *Conflicting Faiths / Christianity versus Communism - A Documentary Comparison* (Washington, DC: Public Affairs Press; First Edition, 1953).

² Charles W. Lowry, “Christianity’s Answer to Communism,” CIA Declassified Document, May 23, 1952. <http://www.foia.cia.gov/best-of-crest/CIA-RDP80R01731R000900080025-2.pdf> (accessed date 1/10/2013)

II, and the United Nations Command (UNC), led by Admiral Turner C. Joy, discussed the violation of neutrality, the location of demarcation lines, the establishment of an international supervisory commission, and an ultimate withdrawal of foreign troops. By mid-1952, the issue of the repatriation of Communist POWs became the major stumbling block in the armistice negotiations. In May 1952, President Harry S. Truman unequivocally announced that there would be no “forced repatriation of prisoners of war.” A bitter struggle between UNC and Communists ensued over the repatriation of Communist POWs, eventually ending with 14,235 Chinese prisoners handed over to Jiang Jieshi’s (Chiang Kai-sek) Nationalist regime in Taiwan on January 20, 1954.³

If we say that United Nations prisoners underwent “brainwashing,” “psychological torture,” or as CIA director Allen Dulles famously labeled it, “Mind murder” or “mendicide”⁴ especially under the administration of the Chinese Communists, the Chinese and North Korean prisoners faced the hellish, violence-filled physical persecution from their captors as well as their fellow prisoners on a daily basis. A notorious tattooing campaign was waged and carried out on both sides. The bodies of POWs became the showcase of the Cold War ideological polemic. Rejecting the fate of being used as bargaining chips in the protracted peace talks, the North Korean and Chinese Communist POWs plotted to sabotage their captors’ intentions, attracting attention at the highest levels of the American government and United Nations Command.

Why did Truman decide to adopt such a “voluntary repatriation” or “non-repatriation” policy while captured American soldiers languished at the hands of the enemy? What were the

³ Eventually “82,500 POWs (including 6,700 Chinese) chose repatriation, while about 50,000 (including 14,700 Chinese) decided not to return to their Communist homelands,” see Barton J. Bernstein, “The Struggle Over the Korea Armistice: Prisoners of Repatriation?” in Bruce Cumming(ed.), *Child of Conflict: The Korean-American Relationship, 1943-1953* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1983), 306.

⁴ Memo to Secretary of Defense, Allen Dulles, Director of CIA, Feb 19, 1953
<http://www.foia.cia.gov/best-of-crest/CIA-RDP80B01676R002600130049-9.pdf> (accessed date 1/10/2013)

backgrounds as well as the objectives and implications of Truman's non-repatriation policy? What were the repercussions of this policy in terms of the long-term psychological warfare against Communists? When one places Truman's policy within the perspective of the historical background, it is easy to see that it was a logical outgrowth of America's long-term policy of waging psychological warfare with the Communist world, as well as American partisan politics and Truman's own preferences. This paper argues that the image of masses of Communist soldiers resisting the tyranny of Communism associated with "voluntary repatriation" was one of the myths in the Cold War. The image that Truman and his advisers strenuously construed in the West stands in stark contrast with the harrowing brutality in the camps. Specifically, in the case of Chinese soldiers, the process of opting to go to Taiwan or to return to mainland China was horrendously violent. Tattooing was the pictorial evidence of the violence that individual POW suffered in the POW compounds.

A previously overlooked issue, the Korean War POW issue, now is attracting academic attention. Scholarship given of POWs during the Korean conflict has been thin compared to the tremendous amount of secondary literature on POWs in World War II and the Vietnam War. Most of the literature has been concentrated on the experience and behavior of the prisoners themselves, especially the narratives of capture, imprisonment, and the nature of camp life. The few works that attempt to place prisoners of war in an international diplomatic context usually concern a specific episode. However, British scholar Rosemary Foot's 1990 work, *A Substitute for Victory*, possessing a rich theoretical analysis and manages to deal with the interplay of international and domestic politics of U.S. policymaking regarding the Korean armistice talks from June 1950 to July 1953.⁵ She provides a descriptive evaluation of the bargaining process

⁵ Rosemary Foot, *A Substitute for Victory: The Politics of Peacemaking at the Korean Armistice Talks* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

concerning the POW issue, setting it against a broader domestic and international background. Regretfully, her claim to be writing international history is compromised by her lopsided treatment, as some critics have pointed out—the diplomacy of Great Britain, India, and South Korea is more nuanced, whereas analysis of the Communist countries' behavior in the negotiations is sparse and generalized.⁶

Due to the stigma attached to POW status during the stalemated conflict, POW issues were emotionally charged. All governments involved—North and South Korea, China and Taiwan, as well as the United States—attached great potential propaganda value to the POWs, who served as bargaining chips for grand diplomatic ploys and a means to claim psychological victory over the other side. In fact, the captors sought to prove the ideological superiority by weaning enemy POWs from their homeland's ideology. Adding further context, the successes and failures of Cold War policies that were cultivated for propaganda, exploitation, and shaping prisoners' identities are revealed through the prism of the emerging Cold War order.

⁶Allan R. Millett, "War Behind The Wire," *Military History Quarterly* (winter 2009), 48-61; Cheng David Chang, "To Return Home or 'Return to Taiwan': Conflict and Survival in the 'Voluntary Repatriation' of Chinese POWs in the Korean War," University of California, San Diego, Ph.D. dissertation, 2011; Charles S. Young, "Voluntary Repatriation and Involuntary Tattooing of Korean War POWs," *Northeast Asia and the Legacy of Harry S. Truman: Japan, China, and the Two Koreas*, James I. Matray, ed. (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2012), 145-167; Robert C. Doyle, *The Enemy in Our Hands: America's Treatment of Enemy Prisoners of War, from the Revolution to the War on Terror* (Lexington, KY.: University Press of Kentucky, 2010); Robert C. Doyle, *Voices From Captivity: Interpreting the American POW Narrative* (Lawrence, Kan.: University of Kansas, 1994); Samuel Meyers and Albert D. Biderman (eds.), *Mass Behavior in Battle and Captivity: The Communist Soldier in the Korean War* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1968); Cyril Cunningham, "The Origins and Development of Communist Prisoner-of-War Policies," *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution* 119, no.1 (March 1974): 38-43; C. Turner Joy, *How Communists Negotiate* (New York: MacMillan, 1953); William H. Vatcher, *Panmunjom: The Story of Korean Armistice Negotiations* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1958; Greenwood Press Reprint, 1973); Walter G. Hermes, *Truce Tent and Fighting Front : United States Army in the Korean War* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, US Army , U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966); Rosemary Foot, *Substitute for Victory: The Politics of Peacemaking at the Korean Armistice Talks* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP 1990); Barton J. Bernstein, "The Struggle Over the Korea Armistice: Prisoners of Repatriation?" in Bruce Cumming (ed.), *Child of Conflict: The Korean-American Relationship, 1943-1953* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1983); Charles S. Young, "POWs: The Hidden Reason for Forgetting Korea," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Volume 33, Issue 2, 2010 Special Issue: 60th Anniversary of the Korean War, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/01402391003590705>

This paper adds a new dimension to the understanding of the significance of the POW issue to a stalemated war, offering a balanced treatment of the prisoner war riots and policies. From Harry S. Truman and his National Security advisors and planners, to Communist prisoners behind barbed-wire stockades, this chapter attempts to expose the inner workings of foreign relations and presents a subtle and multilayered analysis. With Chinese POW memoirs and Chinese governmental publications, this paper also examines in depth, the intentions, tactics, and agendas of the Chinese Communist POWs, adding a human dimension to the Chinese Communist POWs and their struggles.

II. Tattooing, Terror, and Voluntary Repatriation Policy

POWs and a Stalemated War

After a South Korean government was established in 1948, the U.S. withdrew its troops and rejected a military commitment in Korea on strategic grounds. In contrast, the Soviet Union poured in military equipment and economic aid to North Korea. In January, 1950, U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson openly excluded Taiwan and South Korea from the U.S. western Pacific defense perimeter. On June 25, 1950, war broke out on the Korean peninsula after Kim Il Sung, the Soviet-supported North Korean leader, sent his troops to sweep across the 38th parallel, which previously demarcated the occupation zones of the United States and the Soviet Union. As a response to North Korean invasion, the United States intervened in Korea and interposed the Seventh Fleet in the Taiwan Straits, demonstrating its resolve to shelter the politically vulnerable Taiwan to thwart the Communist “aggression.”⁷ The U.S. State Department and the Joint Chief Staff believed that the Seventh Fleet “should not only prevent

⁷ Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, *Patterns in the Dust: Chinese-American Relations and the Recognition Controversy, 1949-1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 195.

CCP (Chinese Communist Party) attacks upon Taiwan but must also keep Chiang Kai-shek from raiding the mainland.”⁸ Four months later, a provoked People’s Republic of China (PRC) plunged the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) into the Korean turmoil after General Douglas MacArthur ventured to cross the 38th parallel to the north and took the war to China. Millions of Chinese People’s Volunteers (CPV) under the command of General Peng Dehuai crossed the Yalu River on October 19, 1950.

The on-and-off truce talks, which started on July 10, 1951, would eventually drag on for two more years. Fraught with mistrust and anxieties, the latter half of the protracted negotiations at Panmunjom was focused on the issue of the repatriation of POWs. On January 2, 1952, the UN negotiation team introduced the concept of “voluntary repatriation” of Communist POWs. On May 7, 1952, in a public statement, Truman unequivocally announced, “We will not buy an armistice by turning over human beings for slaughter or slavery.”⁹ “Just as I had always insisted that we could not abandon the South Koreans who had stood by us and freedom,” the president continued, “so I now refused to agree to any solution that provided for the return against their will of prisoners of war to Communist domination.”¹⁰

Truman’s stand reflected his concerns over the political implication of the ignominious Operation Keelhaul at the end of WWII when 72,000 Soviet POWs were repatriated by the Allied forces back to Stalin’s Soviet Union. Facing the possibility of execution and forced hard labor in Gulag, many of them were denied basic rights and opportunities for the rest of their lives. Many were eventually executed. The Geneva Convention of 1949 was called the “POW Convention” as article 118 stipulated the automatic repatriation of all the POWs at the end of

⁸ Ibid, 196.

⁹ Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs, vol.2, Years of Trial and Hope* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1956), 460-461.

¹⁰ Ibid, 460.

hostilities. It was against such historical background that the policy of voluntary repatriation came to the fore in 1952.

Truman's statement revealed a fundamental distrust of Communist China and North Korea over human rights. In his memoir, Truman later wrote: "Communism is a system that has no regard for human dignity or human freedom, and no right-thinking government can give its consent to the forcible return to such a system of men or women who would rather remain free."¹¹ Despite the lofty rhetoric of protecting the human rights of enemy soldiers, the Truman Administration harbored deep psychological warfare against the Communist enemies. Historian Callum A. MacDonald provided a compelling analysis of the Truman Administration's stand on this: "The president sought an armistice which would allow him to claim moral victory. The defection of large numbers of enemy POWs provided a useful weapon in the battle for Asian hearts and minds and might weaken the authority of the Beijing regime."¹² Coming out of the previous civil wars, in 1952 the PRC and North Korea were not the legitimate governments recognized by the West, which supported the competing regimes in Taiwan and South Korea. The issue of POWs provided propaganda fodder for the West to embarrass the communist governments in China and Korea, which compensated for something they could not achieve in the military battles. Even at the risk of placing the lives of thousands of languished Americans soldiers in the Communist hands, Truman pushed hard the non-repatriation policy.

Truman's Voluntary-Repatriation Policy and Psychological Warfare

On July 4, 1951, the president, Harry S. Truman, asserted at Independence Day Ceremonies: "We must remember that Korea is only part of a wider conflict. The attack on

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Callum A. MacDonald, *Korea: the War before Vietnam* (New York: The Free Press, 1986), 159.

freedom is worldwide. And it is not simply an attack by fire and sword. It is an attack that uses all the weapons that a dictatorship can command: subversion, threats, violence, torture, imprisonment, lies, and deceit.”¹³ Facing a treacherous, immoral enemy who posed a formidable challenge to the values and principles American represented, the Truman Administration felt it necessary to take psychological offensive in the global tug of war with Communism. The containment of Communism “can be achieved not by military measures alone, but by a proper coordination of military, political, diplomatic, economic, and psychological factors and considerations.”¹⁴ By the early 1950s, psychological operations and programs had been incorporated into Truman’s grand strategy of containment.¹⁵

Perhaps nothing better symbolized this administration’s commitment to the psychological struggle than the creation of the Psychological Strategy Board. Founded on April 4, 1951, the board was made up of individuals at the highest levels of policymaking in the U.S. government, including the Under Secretary of State, the United States Deputy Secretary of Defense Deputy Secretary of Defense, and the Director of Central Intelligence, or their designated representatives. Gordon Gray, president of the University of North Carolina and former Secretary of the Army, was appointed by Truman as the first director of the board. The outbreak of the Korean War furnished huge impetus for the creation of the board to respond to growth of Office of Policy Coordination covert activities during the war. Cooperated with another interdepartmental agency, Psychological Operations Coordinating Committee, established in 1951 to oversee overt programs, the board suggested policy options to combat Soviet “Hate

¹³ Harry S. Truman, *The Defense of Freedom* 5 (1951), July 4, 1951, page 5 of 10; Vanderbilt Law School Library, <http://www.heinonline.org.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/HOL/Page?collection=cow&handle=hein.cow/defradd0001&id=7&type=image> (accessed 1/7/2013).

¹⁴ <http://www.foia.cia.gov/best-of-crest/CIA-RDP80R01731R000900080025-2.pdf>

¹⁵ Scott Lucas, “Campaign of Truth: the Psychological Strategy Board and American Ideology, 1951-1953,” *International History Review* 3, 1996, 284.

America” campaign and the Communist charge of U.S. germ warfare in Korea, as well as advised the Far East Command on the Korean truce talks and the repatriation of POWs.¹⁶

By middle 1952, the issue of the repatriation of POWs became the major stumbling block in the armistice negotiations. On May 7, 1952, in a public statement, Truman unequivocally announced that there would be no “forced repatriation of prisoners of war.” The president proclaimed: “We will not buy an armistice by turning over human beings for slaughter or slavery.”¹⁷ Truman’s stand reflected his concerns over the political implication of ignominious Operation Keelhaul back to the end of WWII when 72,000 Soviet POWs were repatriated by the allied forces back to Stalin’s Communism. Facing the possibility of execution and forced hard labor in Gulag, many of them were denied basic rights and opportunities for the rest of their lives. The Geneva Convention of 1949 was called the “POW Convention’ as the article 118 stipulated the automatic repatriation of all the POWs at the end of hostilities. Ironically, history divulged that as the signatory power, the U.S. intended to use the Geneva Convention to embarrass the Soviet Union. Due to moral and ethical concerns for the enemy POWs, as the Truman administration claimed, the U.S. had to reverse its previous position.

Quoting a PSB memo, entitled “The Strategic Significance of Involuntary POW Repatriation in Korea,” in February 1952 Truman’s top psychological warfare experts grew concerned about the feasibility of non-repatriation policy if it remained a stumbling block in the truce talks.¹⁸ As a leader of a democratic society, Truman’s hands were tied by many factors.

¹⁶ Ibid, 291.

¹⁷ Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs, vol.2, Years of Trial and Hope* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1956), 460-461.

¹⁸ “The Strategic Significance of Involuntary POW Repatriation in Korea,” PSB, 12 Feb 1952, <http://www.foia.cia.gov/best-of-crest/CIA-RDP80R01731R003200010022-6.pdf> (1/10/2013 accessed).

In his classic work *The Word War: The Story of American Propaganda*, Thomas C. Sorensen makes a list of the categories of propaganda used by nations. According to Sorensen, “Each involves different but overlapping methods: battlefield psychological warfare, to undermine the enemy’s will to fight; tactical political propaganda, seeking to win support on immediate issues of the day; the long-range influencing of motivations and attitudes in support of long-term national objectives; and indirect propaganda through the influencing of the educational

Mallory Brown of the staff of the National Security Council felt a strong concern for the perception of “exchanging of Chinese lives for American lives”:

At the present time there is no widespread active concern in the US on the question of possible failure on the part of the Chinese to return all American prisoners. But articles now beginning to appear in the press raise the specter that the issue might be presented to the American public as an “exchange of Chinese lives for American lives.” Should this develop, it is likely that the public outcry would obscure the basic moral issue and jeopardize the effectiveness of the US policy decision.¹⁹

Besides, the board believed that there would be “serious implication to involuntary repatriation of POW’s which would have an adverse impact on all future US psychological strategy.”²⁰

Great Britain endorsed Truman’s non-forcible repatriation policy but suggested practical complications under consideration, including arranging provisions for non-repatriates and the aftermath of exposing less desirable POW camp conditions, as well as the “adverse psychological effect of returning mistreated prisoners to their homeland.”²¹

What is less known is the rigorous internal debate within the Administration between July, 1951 and late February, 1952. Brigadier General Robert A. McClure, chief of the U.S. Army’s Psychological Warfare Division, was the first to bring up the human rights concerns of the Communist Chinese and Korean POWs. The Americans took issue with the concept of Chinese “volunteers.” McClure acknowledged that many Chinese “volunteers” were former Nationalist soldiers, who had fought the Chinese Civil War (1945-1949) under Jiang Jieshi’s command. He was concerned that these soldiers had fought in Korea only because they were impressed into Communist service, not because they believed in Communism. According to

processes of other nations.” See Thomas C. Sorensen, *The Word War: The Story of American Propaganda* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1969), 3.

¹⁹ [Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, MO], PSB Files, SMOF, Mallory Browne, box 32, 383.6. “The Strategic Significance of Involuntary POW Repatriation in Korea,” PSB, 12 Feb 1952,

²⁰ “The Strategic Significance of Involuntary POW Repatriation in Korea,” PSB, 12 Feb 1952, <http://www.foia.cia.gov/best-of-crest/CIA-RDP80R01731R003200010022-6.pdf> (1/10/2013 accessed)

²¹ CIA, 042911952, <http://www.foia.cia.gov/best-of-crest/CIA-RDP79T00975A000600560001-3.pdf>

McClure, these soldiers would encounter harsh punishments on their return as had Russian POWs in U.S. custody at the end of World War II. McClure also attached psychological warfare value to voluntary repatriation policy and believed that this policy would “enhance the effectiveness of the United Nations’ psychological warfare campaigns.”²² Charles “Chip” Bohlen, a State Department advisor on Soviet affairs, was another figure who raised the issue and actively advocated the voluntary repatriation policy. Bohlen, who was directly involved in the process of returning Russian POWs at the end of WWII, recalled the “enormous difficulties and trauma, bloodshed” after Americans found out what had happened to the repatriates.²³ He urged Americans to call attention to similar issue rising in Korea.

However, the policy was not enthusiastically endorsed by most military officials who were fighting the enemy on the frontline. When the Communist prisoners were captured, they were shooting at Americans. As State Department diplomat U. Alexis Johnson observed, “the military felt under no obligation to give them [enemy POWs] the opportunity to express their wishes, much less give the other side any pretext under which to retain Americans. It was a good, solid, honest issue.”²⁴ Among Truman’s strongest critics, Admiral Joy, chief of the UN delegation, with hindsight mourned that it [the non-repatriation policy] “cost us over a year of war, and cost our United Nations Command prisoners in Communist camps a year of captivity.”²⁵ Journalist Lawrence Malkin wrote with hindsight that the Administration’s insistence on fighting for the policy demonstrated its desperation to “salvage some moral victory

²² Clayton D. Laurie, “Voluntary Repatriation,” in in *Encyclopedia of the Korean War: A Political, Social and Military History* (Santa Barbara: CA: ABC-Clio, 2000), edited by Spencer C. Tucker, 562.

²³ “Oral History Interview with U. Alexis Johnson,” Washington, D.C. June 19, 1975, by Richard D. McKinzie, Truman Library, <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/oralhist/johnsona.htm> (access date 2/27/2013).

²⁴ “Oral History Interview with U. Alexis Johnson.”

²⁵ Joy C. Turner Joy, *How Communists Negotiate* (New York: MacMillan, 1953), 152.

from the humiliating battlefield stalemate inflicted on them by what they contemptuously regarded as an uncivilized Asian horde.”²⁶

The military had a hard time getting this point across. During January to May of 1952, a rarely used institution, the Armed Forces Policy Council (constituted of members of the NSC, the service Secretaries and the service Chiefs, and the chairmen of the Joint Chiefs) was assembled at the White House to discuss the pros and cons of the policy. John Edwin Hull, Vice Chief of Staff of the Army, and U. Alexis Johnson, State Department expert on Northeast Asian Affairs, were sent to Korea and filed a report, stating “probably we'd have to use very, very considerable force, and there'd be very considerable bloodshed if we'd sought to send them back.”²⁷ Another meeting of the Armed Forces Policy Council was held with President Truman present. Eventually, Truman, endorsed by his Secretary of State Dean Acheson, overruled his opponents on the issue of the repatriation of enemy prisoners.

Some scholars, like MacDonald, argued that Truman’s insistence on the voluntary repatriation was due to pressure from Republicans who condemned the Democrats for “handling over free peoples to communist enslavement at the Yalta conference.”²⁸ By standing firm on the POW issue, the Truman Administration cultivated a tough image of American determination and uncompromising commitment to human rights and individual liberty in the face of Communist aggression, particularly in the aftermath of McCarthyite attacks and Republican accusations of “appeasement.”

The World-shaking “Koje Incident”

Koje Island, off the southeast coast of Korea, was chosen by the United Nations

²⁶ Malkin, “Murderers of Kojedo,” 140.

²⁷ “Oral History Interview with U. Alexis Johnson.”

²⁸ MacDonald, *Korea*, 156.

Command as the site for housing 163,000 prisoners and civilian internees in late 1950s.²⁹ Koje was the largest camp under United Nations Command in which about 80,000 prisoners of war were detained by the United Nations.³⁰ As the war progressed, the forces of the United Nations Command accumulated a staggering number of prisoners of war while guards required for maintaining and administering of the compounds were terribly in short supply.³¹ A then POW camp administrator, First Lieutenant Pendleton Woods observed, “This prison had become so overloaded that control was almost impossible.”³² Statistics show that the actual ratio of guards to POWs in Koje was 1:33, compared to a recommended ratio 1:20.³³ Ever since 26 September 1951, the U.S. Army took leading responsibility of administering UNC POW compounds. However, as a late Department of Army assessment report revealed, the Eighth Army “lacked the manpower to guard this vast number. POWs were accommodated in makeshift compounds where they were allowed to run their own affairs. Camp Security was almost non-existent. This laxity was encouraged by the passive attitude of the POWs and by the belief that the war was almost over.”³⁴ Waves of prison riots eventually reached a culmination when the North Korean POWs successfully plotted to kidnap an American general on May 7, 1952.

Recognizing the inability to handle large number of prisoners by themselves, the United Nations Command grew more and more dependent on Taiwanese and South Korean allies for linguistic and cultural expertise, on many occasions, even the Communist prisoners themselves. Zhao Zuorui, a Chinese prisoner, found that when he first became a POW and was shipped to

²⁹ John S. Benben, “Education of Prisoners of War on Koje Island, Korea,” *Educational Record*, Vol. 36, 1955, 157.

³⁰ “Reds Said to Rule Koje’s Stockades,” *New York Times*, May 13, 1952.

³¹ Callum M. MacDonald, *Korea: The War before Vietnam* (New York: The Free Press, 1987), 134.

³² Pendleton Woods, “An American Officer Observes the Koje Island Uprising,” in *Voices from the Korean War: Personal Stories of American, Korean, and Chinese Soldiers*, Richard Peters and Xiaobing Li eds. (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 214.

³³ Callum M. MacDonald, *Korea: The War before Vietnam* (New York: The Free Press, 1987), 136.

³⁴ Department of Army, *The Handling of POWs during the Korean War*, Military History Office, Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3 June 1960, 5-10.

Pusan, the personnel at the UNC registration tables were prisoners from the North Korean People's Army who spoke both Chinese and Korean.³⁵



36

John Clark from Royal Canadian Regiment spotted there were some difference between Chinese and North Koreans: Seemingly “well pleased to be out of the war,” Chinese were “quite docile” and “were not about to give anyone trouble,” whereas the North Koreans were “restless, hostile, and as arrogant as could be, considering they were prisoners of war.”³⁷ The subtle

³⁵ Colonel Zhao Zuorui, “Organizing the Riots on Koje: Colonel Zhao’s Story,” in *Voices from the Korean War: Personal Stories of American, Korean, and Chinese Soldiers*, Richard Peters and Xiaobing Li eds. (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 243.

³⁶ *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 9, 1952, 1.

³⁷ Donald Knox and Alfred Copped, *The Korean War: Uncertain Victory, The Concluding Volume of An Oral History* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, publishers, 1988), 428.

difference between the two Communist brethren seemed to be eclipsed by the circumstances of facing a common foe.

In retrospect, the disproportionate number of prison guards running POW compounds seemed to give Communists an advantage to launch prison riots or mutinies, which gravely concerned General Matthew Ridgway. He wrote: “In consequence the Communists found it relatively easy to execute the plans of which we were then wholly unaware—the fomenting of mass demonstrations, riots, mutinies, and breakouts, and the subjugation of non-Communist prisoners. The personnel we could spare to take charge of the camps was not of a quality to ensure the alertness needed to detect these plots or to identify and isolate the ringleaders.”³⁸

In the first two years, to win the hearts and minds of Communist prisoners, the United Nations Command launched an experimental education program directed by the Civil Information and Education Section of the Far East Command under the leadership of Lt. Col. D. Nugent, USMC.³⁹ Under Brigadier General Robert A. McClure, the U.S. Army’s Chief of Psychological Warfare, the UNC even attempted to inject religion into the camp lives to impact the POWs to disavow and denounce Communism and to inculcate with the superiority of democracy. However, the moment to test to effectiveness of these programs came when prison riots broke out in the camps.

Agents of Atrocities and the Battle of the Proxies

³⁸ Donald Knox and Alfred Copped, *The Korean War: Uncertain Victory, The Concluding Volume of An Oral History* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, publishers, 1988), 417; Matthew Ridgway, *The Korean War* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967), 206.

³⁹ Barton J. Bernstein, “The Struggle Over the Korean Armistice: Prisoners of Repatriation?” in Bruce Cumming (ed.), *Child of Conflict: The Korean-American Relationship, 1943-1953* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1983), 261-306. John S. Benben, “Education of Prisoners of War on Koje Island, Korea,” *The Educational Record*, Vol. 36, 1955, 157-73; Tal Tovy, “Manifest Destiny in POW Camps: The U.S. Army Reeducation Program During the Korean War,” *The Historian*, 73 (Fall 2011), 503–25; William Lindsay White, *The Captives of Korea: An Unofficial White Paper on the Treatment of War Prisoner* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1957), 110-117.

A bequeathment from the previous civil war experiences in China and Korea, the fratricidal mini civil wars between pro-and anti-communist factions were carried out within the POW compounds. Agents from South Korea and Taiwan were sent to confound the political situation in the prison camps, undertaking saboteur and clandestine attacks against pro-Communist prisoners in an attempt to strengthen pro-Western positions in the camps. Fanning the flames of hatred and aversion toward Communism, Kuomintang and Rhee agents spread unrest and discontent in POW compounds, greatly expanding the savagery of the war. Simultaneously, the highest authorities of the Communist Parties in North Korea supervised infiltration of agents into the prison camps at Kojé. Gen. Nam II, the Chief of the Communist armistice delegation, and other delegates had been “covertly assigned to mastermind incidents within the U.N.C. (United Nations Command) prisoners of war camps’ as the ‘more important’ of their duties” than the diplomatic negotiations at Panmunjom.⁴⁰ According to Zhao Zuorui, an underground Communist organization was established in the POW compounds around fall 1951 and the “Communist United Front” (CUF) was founded in April 1952.⁴¹

Pro-Communist and anti-Communist ringleaders of the compound established dictatorships in the individual camps. Troubles simmered in the POW compounds, causing signs of impending terrorization to appear. Quiet maneuvering and artifice instigated vicious infighting among the POWs. Factions were formed that ruthlessly enforced their own political beliefs upon other prisoners. They even convened courts in the camp to “impose brutal justice on the other group.”⁴² As First Lieutenant Pendleton Woods noticed, “The Communist prisoners

⁴⁰ Lindesay Parrot, “Kojé Riots Linked to Truce Leaders,” *New York Times*, 29 January 1953.

⁴¹ Colonel Zhao Zuorui, “Organizing the Riots on Kojé: Colonel Zhao’s Story,” in *Voices from the Korean War: Personal Stories of American, Korean, and Chinese Soldiers*, Richard Peters and Xiaobing Li eds. (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 250.

⁴² Pendleton Woods, “An American Officer Observes the Kojé Island Uprising,” in *Voices from the Korean War: Personal Stories of American, Korean, and Chinese Soldiers*, Richard Peters and Xiaobing Li eds. (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 213.

had fashioned eating utensils into knives that they could use as weapons within the compound. Behind the chain link and barbed wire fences they were conducting kangaroo courts, and maiming and even killing their fellow prisoners.”⁴³ What happened in Kojé stunned another military man, Capt. Jack McGuire, who was wounded in the April 10 prison riot. He observed that the Red prisoners had turned into a “‘mob of howling savages’ wielding knives, barbed wire flails, clubs and stones.”⁴⁴ As the prolonged armistice talks proceeded, “petitions signed in pencil, pen, blood, and some carrying thumbprints in blood increased in volume requesting that the signers not be returned to Communist areas.”⁴⁵ But how did the Communists become so bold to kidnap an American general? What kind of intentions did they harbor? What could have provoked such an incident?

Quipping the POW compounds as “the second front” of the Korean War, a Chinese officer observed that in the camps the Chinese collaborators were more hated enemies than the UNC captors who tended to treat POWs in a subhuman way:

After the Chinese prisoners had been interrogated and sent to their camps, like Kojé-do, they became both useless and a burden for the UNC. Many of the guards treated the prisoners like animals. The UN officers and men believed that we, the Chinese and North Koreans, were not people like themselves, but near animals, who could be controlled by the use of the same brutality we were accustomed to employ against each other. They selected the traitors and defectors from the prisons and used them to watch us. These Chinese turncoats, I have to say, were worse than the American and South Korean guards in dealing with the problems in the camps.⁴⁶

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ “Story of Night Riot Is Told,” *New York Times*, May 28, 1952

⁴⁵ John S. Benben, “Education of Prisoners of War on Kojé Island, Korea,” *Educational Record*, Vol. 36, 1955, 168.

⁴⁶ Colonel Zhao Zuorui, “Organizing the Riots on Kojé: Colonel Zhao’s Story,” in *Voices from the Korean War: Personal Stories of American, Korean, and Chinese Soldiers*, Richard Peters and Xiaobing Li eds. (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 244.

The American guards, according to historian Callum A. MacDonald, often “displayed their racist dislike of ‘Gooks’ by harsh treatment.”⁴⁷ Obviously to Zhao the importance of political allegiance transcended the prejudiced attitude of the captors.

Li Da-an, “a diehard traitor and a nightmare to the CPVF [Chinese People’s Volunteer Force], but a ‘model collaborator’ to the UNC at Koje-do,” wanted to tattoo anti-Communist slogans in every single POW in Compound 72 where he was a brigade leader.⁴⁸ Li, like other ringleaders, installed a rule of terror in the prison camp 72. Prisoners who violated their rules will face the fate of being beaten to death. By forcefully inscribing anti-Communist slogans upon POW’s skin, Li wished to coerce more POWs to refuse to return to China.

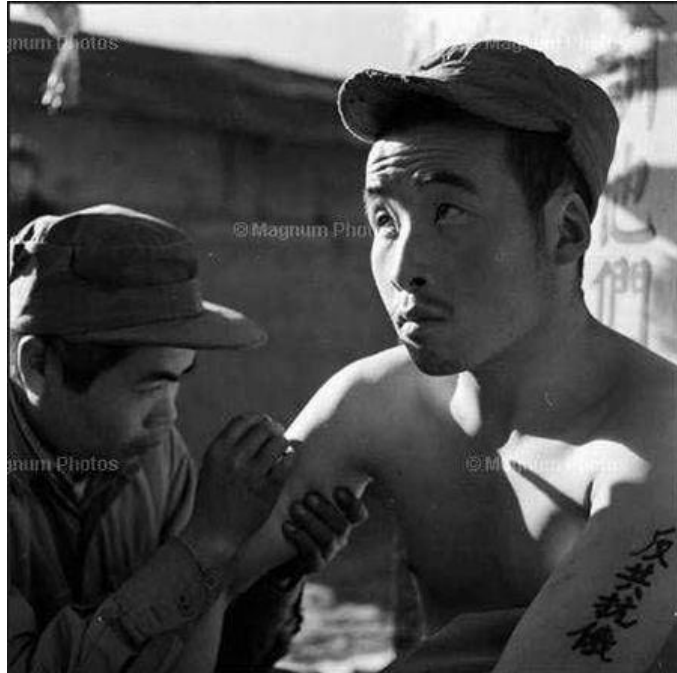
On April 7, in front of a general assembly Li called upon, Li stabbed a college freshman, Lin Xuepu, with a big dagger, and tore his heart out of his chest simply because Lin refused to cooperate. Holding Lin’s beating bleeding heart, Li terrorized the petrified crowd who just eye-witnessed a ghastly murder. “Whoever dares to refuse the tattoo will be like him!” Li shouted out.⁴⁹

On April 8, 1952, UNC started the screening process, dividing Communist POWs into those who did and those who did not wish to return to Communism by force in the event of a Korean truce.

⁴⁷ Callum A. MacDonald, *Korea: The War before Vietnam* (New York: The Free Press, 1987), 135.

⁴⁸ Colonel Zhao Zuorui, “Organizing the Riots on Koje: Colonel Zhao’s Story,” in *Voices from the Korean War: Personal Stories of American, Korean, and Chinese Soldiers*, Richard Peters and Xiaobing Li eds. (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 248, 244.

⁴⁹ Colonel Zhao Zuorui, “Organizing the Riots on Koje: Colonel Zhao’s Story,” in *Voices from the Korean War: Personal Stories of American, Korean, and Chinese Soldiers*, Richard Peters and Xiaobing Li eds. (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 245; Zhang Zeshi, Zhao Guoxi and Ding Xianwen, “*buwei qiangbao de Lin Xuepu*” [The Indomitable Lin Xuepu], in *Kaoyan: Zhiyuanjun zhangfu meijun jizhongying qinliji* [Test: Personal Accounts of Chinese People’s Volunteer Army Prisoners in U.S. Army’s Concentration Camps], ed. Zhang Zeshi (Beijing, 1998), 330-334.



50

A Chinese POW is receiving tattooing from one fellow POW on his right arm. There is an ostensible anticommunist tattoo on his left arm, saying “*fanggong kanger*” (Fight against the Communists and the Soviets”)



51

Zhang Jingyao (left) insisted on returning China irrespective of slaughtering violence in the POW compounds. He and his comrades tattooed Communist slogans on the skin: “*Kangmeiyuanchao*” [Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea and Protect Our Homes and

⁵⁰ <http://xjklmyhsxc.blog.163.com/blog/static/95082433201011572951707/> (accessed date 1/1120130).

⁵¹ *New China Digest (XinHua Wen Zhai)*, Issue 9, 1953.

Defend Our Country]” “*Gemingdaodi*” [Carry the Revolution Through to the End], as well as Communist military insignias.

The “Prisoner” of the Prisoners of War

Brigadier General Francis T. Dodd was appointed as prison commander at Koje on February 20, 1952. In early 1952, there were two bloody riots provoked by die-hard North Korean Communist prisoners. The confrontation between prisoners and prison guards caused eighty-seven prisoner deaths and one guard death.⁵² Hundreds of prisoners were injured.⁵³

General Dodd, a West Point graduate and former commander of Koje, was held captive in Compound 76 for 78 hours. On the morning of May 8, 1952, the North Korean POWs seized him at the compound gate when he and his aides conferred and negotiated with prisoners through barbed wire fences unarmed and unescorted. In the hustle, Dodd was overpowered by the prisoners and dragged inside a barbed-wire enclosure, while his aide, Lt. Col. Wilbur Robert Raven, fought his way out of the group and escaped. The anguished general was released at 9:30 p.m. (7:30 a.m., EST, Saturday) after 78-hour-and-15-minute being held captive.⁵⁴ Gen. Colson, Dodd’s successor, obtained his release by granting concessions to the North Korean and Chinese prisoners and threatening to storm compound 76 where Dodd was held.⁵⁵

Almost immediately after the seizure of Dodd, in Compound 76 a larger banner was raised inside, saying: “We captured Dodd. If you do not show force he will be unharmed.”⁵⁶ The Allied believed this previously prepared banner not only demonstrated the prisoner’s contempt for the UNC, but also revealed that the kidnapping was a deliberate act.⁵⁷ The Allies’

⁵² “Dodd Freed Unharmed; Reds Receive Concessions,” *Washington Post*, May 11, 1952.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ “Colson Ousted as Commander of POW Camp,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 13, 1952.

⁵⁶ “Reds Said to Rule Koje’s Stockades,” *New York Times*, May 13, 1952.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

suspicion was borne out by later intelligence report after the UNC launched a series of investigations in an effort to lift “a tight veil of secrecy on the bizarre incident.”⁵⁸

On the afternoon of the same day, Colonel Zhao recalled, UNC forces were “armed with tanks, heavy machine guns, and offshore gunboats placed Compound 76 under siege. Two helicopters also patrolled the area.”⁵⁹ On the next day, Brigadier General Charles Colson was appointed by UNC as the new commander of Koje prison. General James Van Fleet, the Commander of Eighth Army, arrived with 15,000 heavily armed UN troops to confront the mass of prisoners in the stormy Compound 76.

Behind the barbed-wire enclosures of Compound 76, North Korean and Chinese prisoner leaders were engaged in intense discussions about what to do with Dodd. Many years later, Colonel Zhao reminisced,

An alive and a freed Dodd out here could do much more for our cause than a dead or detained Dodd in there... a hostage situation might give the UNC an excuse to murder more prisoners and put more pressure on the Chinese-North Korean delegation at the truce negotiations. The situation might get out of control and turn into a real riot, as the UNC had already declared in its anti-Communist propaganda. It would not help us in our efforts to improve camp life or to achieve a total repatriation of the prisoners and a cease-fire in the war.⁶⁰

A Chinese-North Korean Prisoner Delegation emerged in the meeting. Dodd was brought to a prison court room with the presence of Communist delegates, as well as victims and witnesses of prison violence. The prisoners began to air their grievance: less than desirable living situation, stories of murder and brutal, frequent rapes and gang rapes of women prisoners by both prison guards and prisoners. Dodd was shocked to hear and could not believe such violent incidents

⁵⁸ Lindsay Parrotts, “Koje Riots Linked to Truce Leaders,” *New York Times*, Jan. 29, 1953.

⁵⁹ Colonel Zhao Zuorui, “Organizing the Riots on Koje: Colonel Zhao’s Story,” in *Voices from the Korean War: Personal Stories of American, Korean, and Chinese Soldiers*, Richard Peters and Xiaobing Li eds. (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 254.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 255.

occurred under his command. A field telephone line was set up between Dodd and the new commander, General Colson.⁶¹ Acting as an intermediary in the barter deal for his life, Dodd passed on the prisoners' demands: (1) stop the abuse and murder of the prisoners; (2) stop the "voluntary repatriation" preparations; (3) agree to the organization of a "Chinese-North Korean Delegation" to coordinate the camp activities; (4) start the termination of the voluntary repatriation efforts.⁶²

In two documents purporting to be official, prisoners penned their grievances and demanded for concessions from UNC. Both Gen. Dodd and Gen. Colson signed two documents entitled "Korean-Chinese Prisoners' Grievances to the World," and "UNC POW Camp Affidavit." Finally on May 10, Dodd stated: "I am responsible for what happened here. And I am guilty."⁶³ At the same time, outside the compound, Gen. Colson made the following statement: "I do admit there have been instances of bloodshed where many prisoners of war have been killed and wounded by UN forces. I can assure you that in the future the prisoners of war can expect humane treatment in this camp according to the principles of international law. I will do all within my power to eliminate further violence and bloodshed."⁶⁴ The promise made to grant prisoners no more screening and right to organize in Compounds were later repudiated and precipitating public criticism afterwards.

The melee at the gate of Compound 76 and Communist prisoners' kidnaping of a UN commander shook the world. International and domestic reaction to the incident was severe. On

⁶¹ Murray Schumachs, "Gen. Dodd is Freed by Kojé Captives Unhurt and Happy," *New York Times*, May 11, 1952.

⁶² Colonel Zhao Zuorui, "Organizing the Riots on Kojé: Colonel Zhao's Story," in *Voices from the Korean War: Personal Stories of American, Korean, and Chinese Soldiers*, Richard Peters and Xiaobing Li eds. (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 255; Lindsay Parrotts, "Blackmail is Laid to Kojé Captives in Dodd's Ransom," *New York Times*, May 13, 1952.

⁶³ Colonel Zhao Zuorui, "Organizing the Riots on Kojé: Colonel Zhao's Story," in *Voices from the Korean War: Personal Stories of American, Korean, and Chinese Soldiers*, Richard Peters and Xiaobing Li eds. (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 255.

⁶⁴ "Prisoners of War Have Full Control Inside Compound," *the Washington Post*, May 13, 1952.

May 13, *New York Times* reported alarmingly that a “prisoners’ Soviet” was set up inside the compound, while Dodd himself was used as a “truce weapon” by the Reds.⁶⁵

When the news reached the Far East Command in Tokyo, Gen. Ridgway was about to leave for Paris to take Gen. Eisenhower’s post. The Dodd Incident shocked Gen. Ridgway who on May 8 ordered Gen. Van Fleet, the Eighth Army chief, to use “whatever force is necessary” to free the captive general and establish control in Kojoe.⁶⁶ Ridgway described the kidnapping as “a flagrant disregard of authority.”⁶⁷ Ridgway worried that the incident “may very well affect the Korean truce talks.” “This is a situation of the Communists’ own creation, and in their world where neither logic nor truth has any value, there is no telling to what extent they will build up this incident,” the Allied Commander continued.

Ridgway’s words sparked frenzy in the Communist world. The prisoners, hearing that Gen. Van Fleet threatened to use force to rescue Dodd, responded to threaten to kill Dodd and “stage a mass break if troops and tanks stormed their compound on a rescue mission.”⁶⁸ In Panmunjom, Gen. Nam Il, North Korean chief delegate accused the Allies of plotting “another massacre” of the “bare-handed” prisoners to liberate Gen. Dodd.⁶⁹ “This is not to be tolerated,” he asserted.⁷⁰ Appealing to world opinion, Nam also “warned that the commanders on each side had an ‘inescapable obligation to insure the safety and respect for the personal dignity of the prisoners.’”⁷¹ Nam charged that the prisoners who decided not to return Communist territories

⁶⁵ Lindsay Parrotts, “Blackmail is Laid to Kojoe Captives in Dodd’s Ransom,” *New York Times*, May 13, 1952.

⁶⁶ Wayne Thomis, “Ridgway Orders Force to Free General Seized by POWs,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 9, 1952.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ “Colson Ousted as Commander of POW Camp,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 13, 1952.

⁶⁹ “Dodd Freed Unharmed; Reds Receive Concessions,” *Washington Post*, May 11, 1952.

⁷⁰ Lindsay Parrotts, “Reds say Allies Plan a Massacre to Liberate Dodd on Kojoe Island,” *New York Times*, May 10, 1952.

⁷¹ Lindsay Parrotts, “Foe Warns Allies to Spare Captives,” *New York Times*, May 12, 1952; Murray Schumachs, “News on Gen. Dodd Withheld by Army As Inquiry,” *New York Times*, May 12, 1952.

after a cease-fire were acting “under compulsion.” He argued against the forcible screening process, which had already caused “hundreds” of deaths.⁷² Nam further maintained that it was “not the Allies business to ask their soldiers on which side of the Iron Curtain they preferred to live.”⁷³ Radio in Pyongyang, capital of North Korea, interpreted the hostage incident as a demonstration of Red captives’ desire ‘for their mass return to Communism.’⁷⁴

The United Nations Command read the Communists as hammering away the familiar propaganda line and continuing to discredit the United Nations’ non-repatriation policy. The leading UNC negotiator, Vice Admiral Charles Turner Joy, refuted the charge by saying the Communists had already “demonstrated their fear that many thousands of their men, if permitted, would declare openly against the Marxian creed, as they had done behind the barbed wire of the Allied stockade.”⁷⁵ Gen. Joy proposed that the two sides conduct a joint open verification of the screening of POWs and pointed out the delay on the Communist side to accept the proposal would reinforce their fear that it was the POWs themselves who did not want to repatriate. Admiral Joy also retorted that charge of threat to kill captives to free Dodd had been “totally unfounded on fact.”⁷⁶

After Gen. Mark W. Clark succeeded Gen. Ridgway as the head of United Nations Far East Command on May 12, he made the Dodd case the focus of his press statement. He referred Communists’ hostage of Gen. Dodd to ask for concessions as “unadulterated blackmail.”⁷⁷ “The prisoners apparently sought to influence the course of the truce talks at Panmunjom,” perceived by Gen. Clark. He continued to state: “Any violence that has occurred at Kojedo has been the

⁷² Parrotts, “Foe Warns Allie.”

⁷³ “Prisoners of War Have Full Control Inside Compound,” *the Washington Post*, May 13, 1952.

⁷⁴ “Reds Use Dodd as Truce Weapon,” *the Washington Post*, May 10, 1952.

⁷⁵ Lindsay Parrotts, “Foe Warns Allies to Spare Captives,” *New York Times*, May 12, 1952.

⁷⁶ Lindsay Parrotts, “Reds say Allies Plan a Massacre to Liberate Dodd on Kojedo Island,” *New York Times*, May 10, 1952.

⁷⁷ “Prisoners of War Have Full Control.”

result of the deliberate and planned machinations of unprincipled Communist leaders whose avowed intent has been to disrupt the orderly operation of the camp and to embarrass the United Nations Command in every way possible.”⁷⁸ Hinting “some concession might not be honored,” Gen. Clark added that the concessions were granted “under duress at a time when the life of General Dodd was at stake. Any commitment made...as a result of such demands should be interpreted accordingly.”⁷⁹

On May 11, *Washington Post* reported, the general was “in good spirits as he is flown to Parley with Van Fleet.”⁸⁰ Up to May 13, there was “no disciplinary action taken against captives who held General Dodd hostage.” A conclave of compound representatives and delegates were sent to the “War Criminal Camp” at Koje-do.⁸¹ The promises made by Brig. Gen. Charles F. Colson and Gen. Dodd were later repudiated by the United Nations Command, headed by Gen. Clark. Colson and Dodd were both cleared and were faced with the prospect of penalties ranging from reprimands to formal courts-martial. An old China hand, Brigadier General Haydon L. Boatner, later labeled by the Communists as the “Butcher of Koje Island,” implemented a new tough policy in Koje to resume order and subdue the captives.

⁷⁸ Lindsay Parrotts, “Blackmail is Laid to Koje Captives in Dodd’s Ransom,” *New York Times*, May 13, 1952.

⁷⁹ “Prisoners of War Have Full Control Inside Compound,” *the Washington Post*, May 13, 1952.

⁸⁰ “Dodd Freed Unharmed; Reds Receive Concessions,” *Washington Post*, May 11, 1952.

⁸¹ Colonel Zhao Zuorui, “Organizing the Riots on Koje: Colonel Zhao’s Story,” in *Voices from the Korean War: Personal Stories of American, Korean, and Chinese Soldiers*, Richard Peters and Xiaobing Li eds. (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 258.

COMMUNISTS ON KOJE ISLAND DISPLAY SIGN



82

“A North Korean sign behind the barb wired fences”

But the story did not end here. Eight months later, based on an intelligence report, Gen. Clark angrily charged that Communist delegates at Panmunjom while conducting truce negotiation had masterminded the prison revolts and kidnapped Gen. Dodd.⁸³ The report said, evidences had pointed out that Gen. Nam II, chief of the Communist armistice delegation, was the hidden controlling influence who instigated and inspired the riots.⁸⁴ Based on captured documents and testimony of witnesses, the sources also indicated that the Soviet Union also played a role in the eruption of prison breakout.

Backfire at Home

A Defense Department spokesman rebuke General Colson for admitting that there had been bloodshed on Kojima and to promise that “in the future prisoners of war can be expecting

⁸² Lindsay Parrott, “Denies Reprimand,” *New York Times*, May 15, 1952.

⁸³ Lindsay Parrotts, “Kojima Riots Linked to Truce Leaders,” *New York Times*, Jan. 29, 1953.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

humane treatment.”⁸⁵ In an attempt to correct, the Pentagon claimed that “earlier bloodshed and violence mentioned in the agreement had been brought on by the Red POWs; that the prisoners had been treated humanely in accordance with the Geneva Convention, and that there had been no forcible screening.”⁸⁶ But the damage was already made. Part of the criticism emerging from this line of argument is resounding criticism of the immediate leadership of the Koje prison. Despite the understanding that General Clark’s earlier comments indicates, the UN Command got off on the wrong foot immediately by conceding to the Communist prisoners. On handling the Dodd Incident on Koje Island, the *New York Times* editorialized on May 13, 1952 “Appeasement as a means of operating Communist prisoners of war camps on Koje Island seemed to have been proved a complete failure by the statements made yesterday by Allied authorities.”⁸⁷ The seizure of Dodd not only accidentally sabotaged a previously worked -up international plan which Truman and his advisers aimed to break the truce deadlock, but also rendered the U.S. “the laughing stock of the Asiatic world, where ‘face’ counts for everything.”⁸⁸

On May 17th, Representative William G. Bray(R-Ind.) commented on the incident as another “of a long series of colossal blunders.”⁸⁹ Bray, who had previously visited POW hospitals in Korea, criticized the Truman Administration for letting the Communists score a propaganda coup by admitting that the United Nations had mistreated Communist prisoners. He added: “to get the general out of this prison camp, our command made concessions to these prisoners and admitted to the world that we had mistreated the communist prisoners, that we had treated them barbarously.”⁹⁰

⁸⁵ “Colson Ousted as Commander of POW Camp,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 13, 1952.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ “Reds Said to Rule Koje’s Stockades,” *New York Times*, May 13, 1952.

⁸⁸ Drew Pearson, “Pentagon Assails Dodd as Carless,” *The Washington Post*, May 15, 1952.

⁸⁹ “Bray Calls Koje Incident New ‘Colossal Blunder,’” *The Washington Post*, May 18, 1952.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

Of course, the way the Truman administration handled Communist prisoner riots invited a scathing critique from the Republicans. A recurrent theme for the 1952 Republican presidential campaign was condemnation of the failure of the Truman administration to wage effective ideological struggle against Communism. Bray went on: “Yet with one stroke, to save a general, who by his own incompetence got himself into trouble, we have admitted to the world that we are guilty of the barbarism of which we are accused by the Communists.”⁹¹ By validating the charge of “barbarous behavior,” this administration’s blunder offset previous efforts to propagandize the image of America, greatly damaging America’s prestige and credibility.⁹²

III. Conclusion

Among Truman’s strongest critics, Admiral Turner C. Joy, the UN delegation at Panmunjom, with hindsight mourned that the voluntary repatriation policy “cost us over a year of war, and cost our United Nations Command prisoners in Communist camps a year of captivity.”⁹³ Eventually Truman, endorsed by his Secretary of State Dean Acheson, overruled his opponents in this matter. So began this prolonged struggle surrounding POWs with the Communists, which eventually ended with 14,235 Chinese prisoners handed over to Jiang Jieshi’s Nationalist regime in Taiwan on January 20, 1954.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² “Reds Use Dodd as Truce Weapon,” *the Washington Post*, May 10, 1952.

⁹³ Joy C. Turner Joy, *How Communists Negotiate* (New York: MacMillan, 1953), 152.

⁹⁴ Eventually “82,500 POWs (including 6,700 Chinese) chose repatriation, while about 50,000 (including 14, 7000 Chinese) decided not to return to their Communist homelands,” see Barton J. Bernstein, “The Struggle Over the Korea Armistice: Prisoners of Repatriation?” in Bruce Cumming(ed.), *Child of Conflict: The Korean-American Relationship, 1943-1953* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1983), 306.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower continued the policy of Truman, indicating unity on foreign policy issues in the early Cold War. Both parties advocated American moral superiority. They came together on the issue of voluntary repatriation of enemy POWs. Along with the issue of the unification of Germany, Austria, Indochina and international control of atomic energy, an armistice in Korea became one of the celebrated accomplishments of the Eisenhower Administration, which was inaugurated in January 1953. The Eisenhower administration embraced releasing prisoners of war on their own terms, a policy which received bipartisan support because of moral and humanitarian concerns. In an address at Columbia University on May 31, 1954, President Eisenhower, exhorted the American people to cherish the American value of personal liberty. Eisenhower stated: "The armistice in Korea, moreover, inaugurated a new principle of freedom—that prisoners of war are entitled to choose the side to which they wish to be released. In its impact on history, that one principle may weigh more than any battle of our time."⁹⁵

In Panmunjom, the Communist negotiators and delegates charged that the UNC attempted to wreck the armistice talks by insisting on the principle of voluntary repatriation. Not even signatory powers, both China and North Korea accused the U.S. of violating the Geneva Conventions on the matter of POW Repatriation, which further accentuated the political and ideological differences between the two sides. The armistice talks arrived at a deadlock. However, while negotiations dragged on interminably at Panmunjom, North Korean and Chinese prisoners of war launched waves of riots to unleash their frustration and air their grievances. Coupled with the Communists' germ warfare charges, the Kojé riots deeply embarrassed the

⁹⁵ Dwight D. Eisenhower: "Address at the Columbia University National Bicentennial Dinner, New York City," May 31, 1954. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=9906> (accessed date 02/13/2013).

UNC and the Truman administration. The incarceration of an American general, in particular, the two documents with the signatures of two American generals, helped the Communists score a propaganda coup at the Kojedo Camp by telling a story to the world that the UN forces were “the brutal persecutors and murders of their prisoners.”⁹⁶

With the scope of a limited war with the limitations of atomic warfare, and the definition of the Cold War as a contest for supremacy of absolute values, the appeal to the mind became an essential and ultimate part of the Cold War struggle. The situation in Kojedo eventually got out of the control of UNC and turned into violent riots. The periodic riots marked the failure of UNC’s previous ideological indoctrination program and psychological warfare operations to control the minds and bodies of prisoners, creating the perception that in the prison camps, a top-down concerted approach by the prison command to secure prisoners’ political allegiance was a fiasco. In addition to Kojedo riots, the deadlocks in Panmunjom, and rumors of Nationalist China’s influence in the camps, “raised questions about U.S. policy which the government felt ill-equipped to answer.”⁹⁷

Both sides were using Communist POWs in propaganda as “heroes behind the barbed wire.” Communist propagandists emblazoned the Chinese and North Korean captives as “POW heroes,” who staged “the ‘heroic assistance to bloody suppression.’”⁹⁸ The appalling terror and level of brutality in the camps revealed how the Cold War ideological struggle was deeply

⁹⁶ Colonel Zhao Zuerui, “Organizing the Riots on Kojedo: Colonel Zhao’s Story,” in *Voices from the Korean War: Personal Stories of American, Korean, and Chinese Soldiers*, Richard Peters and Xiaobing Li eds. (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 257.

⁹⁷ MacDonald, *Korea*, 163. Some American officials acknowledged that Jiang’s forces had involved in the struggle in the prison camps. As the first United States Ambassador to South Korea (1949-1952) John J. Muccio belatedly recalled, “[Charles A.] Willoughby sent down to Taipei and got some seventy-five camp guards,” who were suspected secret police of Chiang Kai-shek. See “Oral History Interview with John J. Muccio,” Washington, D. C. February 18, 1971 by Jerry N. Hess, Truman Library, <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/oralhist/muccio2.htm#100> (access date, 2/19/2013).

⁹⁸ Lindesay Parrotts, “Reds say Allies Plan a Massacre to Liberate Dodd on Kojedo Island,” *New York Times*, May 10, 1952.

complicated by the lingering Asian civil wars. Beatings, mutilation, and murder initiated by Nationalist Chinese and South Koreans demonstrated America's inability to effectively control operations of allies in the prison camps. Compared to the brainwashing tactics Chinese allegedly employed, the UNC had to compete with violent South Korean and Taiwanese agents who were deliberately planted in the camps to win the political allegiance of the prisoners. Tattooing anti-Communist slogans on their arms and backs certainly were illustrative of the tragic consequences the individual POW bore. As one historian Charles S. Young stated, "To brand the POWs, barracks bosses required ultimate control: ownership of the skin."⁹⁹

When massive numbers of Communist POWs opted for non-repatriation, they were celebrated by the West as a "symbol of moral victory" and "heroes behind barbed wire." Within the camps, prisoners were actually controlled by their fellow prisoners with the routine use of terror.¹⁰⁰ Perhaps nothing better summarizes the role of prison riots for the UN cause than the following statement: "the prison riots were more than embarrassing to the UN Command; they also undercut the high moral ground the UN had assumed when it endorsed the principle of voluntary repatriation."¹⁰¹ In a 1971 interview, the first U.S. ambassador to South Korea, John J. Muccio belatedly admitted that Americans should be responsible for the brutality in the camps; however, many Americans might not be aware of the severity of the struggle. He stated: "And

⁹⁹ Charles S. Young, "Voluntary Repatriation and Involuntary Tattooing of Korean War POWs," *Northeast Asia and the Legacy of Harry S. Truman: Japan, China, and the Two Koreas*, James I. Matray, ed. (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2012), 163.

¹⁰⁰ MacDonal, *Korea*, 134.

¹⁰¹ Richard Peters and Xiaobing Li, "Chapter 5: Truce Talks and Prison Riots," in *Voices from the Korean War: Personal Stories of American, Korean, and Chinese Soldiers*, Richard Peters and Xiaobing Li eds. (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 39; Brian Catchpole, *The Korean War, 1950-53* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2000), 208-10; Stanley Sandler, *The Korean War: No Victors, No Vanquished* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 214-15.

what went on within those camps...but there was a terrific ideological struggle in those cages that we were responsible for, but we were not aware what was going on in there.”¹⁰²

The story of repatriation of Communist POWs is an ambiguous, murky terrain, which defies neat categorization. Words like “defection,” “collaboration,” and “betrayal” have carried different meanings for different groups. Ha Jin’s *War Trash* provided a fictionalized account of one former Nationalist soldier who reluctantly joined the CPVF, and survived a disturbingly bloody power struggle between pro-and anti-Communist factions in order to reunite with his family.¹⁰³ For the protagonist in *War Trash*, Cold War strategists’ struggle for supremacy of ideologies is irrelevant. His life is about the struggle for survival. When the Korean War broke out, the Chinese military desperately needed new blood. Many new recruits came from “problematic” elements of the society—“wealthy families, such as landlords, business owners, bankers, and other bourgeois and capitalist classes accustomed to exploiting the less fortunate members of society” from the perspective of a loyal Communist commodore Colonel Zhao. They joined the PLA “to escape the revolutionary movement or class struggle. They hated the PLA and the Chinese Communist Party.”¹⁰⁴ Mixed motives and many people’s pragmatic loyalty to the party might explain the massive numbers of non-repatriates among the Chinese POWs.

¹⁰² “Oral History Interview with John J. Muccio.”

¹⁰³ Ha Jin, *War Trash* (New York: Vintage, 2004).

¹⁰⁴ Colonel Zhao Zuorui, “Organizing the Riots on Koje: Colonel Zhao’s Story,” 247.