Camp 14: Total Control Zone

By Unknown
I still suffer from nightmares. It's better than the beginning of my stay here. But I still have nightmares. It's not as bad as used to be. It's become part of my every day life. I try to ignore the nightmares. I'm resting, so I don't have to do other things. I'm sitting in the room without thoughts and without doing anything. This helps me kill time. I don't want to think about anything. Many people have called me recently, they ask me to tell my story but I politely refuse. I often feel very tired and exhausted. That's why I say no to such requests. Of course if I think about it I could do a lot. Maybe it's hard for others to comprehend the outside world was inconceivable to me. I had never seen the world on the other side of defence. I had an idea that there was a country of North Korea and a bigger world but I thought that world would be exactly like the labour camp. I couldn't conceive of anything else. I started with forced labour when I was six. When I started in school. I was just a little boy. The children went into the mines and push the wagons out. The adults had loaded with them coal and we gather all the coal that had fall out to the ground.

CAMP 14 TOTAL CONTROL ZONE
What did the terrain behind the camp look like? There was a long mountain range. Was there anything on top of the hills?
Yes, a barbed wire fence.
This was the guards' village.
It had an extra fence around it.
Their own village with a fence.
A secured area in a secure camp.
That sounds crazy.
Were the guards scared of revolts?
That was the coal mine.
This is where the prisoners lived.
That's where I lived with my mother.
I lived with my mother in a
small house in the camp.
There was just one room and we slept there.
This was also the kitchen.
There was no furniture. We had no
options but to sleep on the concrete floor.
In the wintertime we put on
as many clothes as possible.
The picture of the camp is almost finished.
Where did the public executions take place?
Here, in a perfectly ordinary field.
The victims were tied to posts.
They faced the river.
Shin, what is your first
memory as a kid in the camp?
It's nothing special.
There's no particular
event that I remember.
Or maybe yes, when I went to a
public executions with my mother.
I was very young, maybe four
years old. That was the first time.
I remember the poster about the execution.
There was always a poster that announce
the day and the time the executions take place.
Several thousands spectators
came to the executions.
Except for the inmates who had to work
all the prisoners were forced
to appear at these executions.
After the accused had been
tied to the post with a rope
a guard or someone higher-up came and said
the prisoners had to work hard
to serve their sentences. These inmates hadn't work hard and they hadn't been obedient. That's why they would been executed. Immediately after this declaration they were shot with machine guns. When the shots were fired I panicked, That is my first memory of my childhood in the camp.

I have a cold. That's why I don't really have an appetite. Oh-Young-Nam ex officer secret police service ministry of internal security, North Korea I haven't been sleeping well either. That's why it's really hard for me. I knew yesterday that I needed to go to bed early for the interview today but I didn't sleep well.

Kwon Hyuk ex commander of the guards Camp 22, North Korea

Can I make myself comfortable on this chair? It doesn't take much to be arrested in North Korea. In the North Korean system you're arrested if you name the leaders Kim Il-Sung and King Jong-Il without using the address 'Tongji, comrade'. That'll land you in a camp. In North Korea people smoke by filling the papers with loose tobacco. Since there isn't enough paper for these cigarettes some people use the "Rodong Workers Newspaper" instead. They're sent to a camp because they failed to notice that newspaper contained a portrait of the leader Kim Il-Sung. We never did the arrests during the day. That was always at night, in secret, without the neighbours noticing. The arrested individuals weren't allowed to take anything with them. If an entire family was brought to a camp for political prisoners the family members had no idea why they
had even been sent to prison camp.
Often only the accused did know the reason.
The rule in the prison camp
is that the arrested family
is never allowed to be together again.
Authentic footage of a police interrogation in North Korea,
smuggled out of the country by a human rights organization.
After being deported to a labour camp,
you're not treated as human beings anymore.
You're treated like animals.
We, the guards, screamed at them: "At least
as pigs you would have been of use!"
In the camp the life of an inmate
is worthless than the life of a worm.
They can't defend themselves,
not even when they're being beaten.
I could do anything with the
prisoners that I felt like.
The decision whether to kill them or let
them live was completely up to me.
It's a shame that I can
only see my home from afar.
But at the border I can be a
little closer to North Korea.
I can at least see my home,
even though from afar.
My home is over there.
It's North Korea.
When I arrived in South Korea I was
picked up from the airport in Seoul.
I was interrogated by the
secret service for weeks.
They checked my statements.
I had to take lie detect to tests.
These investigators are experts.
They know all about labour camps
in North Korea in details.
You can't tell them any lies.
They are perfectly informed.
When North Korean refugees come to South
Korea they check who the refugees are.
I had to make a sworn written statement
that I would never talk about the
contents of these interrogations.
The only food in the camp was maize and Chinese cabbage soup. Three times a day for twelve months of the year. Always the same food. If you made a mistake you were only given half as punishment. They only got a single spoonful. The guards decided that under own. It was far too little. We were always starving. We only ate meat when we caught rats. When a rat got into the room we closed all the doors and killed it. Then we quickly held it in the fire to burn off the hairs. Then we skinned and gutted it. Then we cooked it in the fire and ate it. There no was special method. Rats have soft bones so we ate absolutely everything including the bones. You could assume that the inmates would say: "So what, if we get killed, we'll just die." But that's not true. The inmates in the camp feel a greater desire to live than before. They want to survive by all means possible.

Simply put: survive in the camp, you have to obey. Otherwise you'll be killed. Private footage of Camp 22, filmed by Commander Kwon Hyuk The five rules and regulations of the labour camp:

Firstly: Anyone trying to escape will be shot immediately. Anybody who sees an inmate trying to escape and doesn't reported will be shot immediately.
Secondly:
Anyone who steals or hides any food will be shot immediately.

Thirdly:
the state security department completely.
Those who display improper or disobedient behaviour towards the teacher of the state security department, will be shot immediately.

Fourthly:
are not allowed to be in contact privately.
If physical contact exist between man and woman without permission they will be shot immediately.

Lastly:
remorse for the own mistakes.
Those who cannot take responsibility for the own guilt or who have an opinion about that guilt will be shot immediately.
There are camp officers who monitor and control the birth of children and the sex lives of the inmates.
The women are sometimes sexually abused or even got pregnant by the guards.
Since life in the camp is very tough, the women put up with everything.
They hope that their lives will be easier if a guard likes them and they have his child.

One example:
Most of the female inmates were attractive.
Before they came to the camp, they usually led a life of affluence.
That's why they had particularly pretty faces.
When I liked a woman, I called her and took her home.
She knew she wasn't allowed to refuse.
Otherwise she would be shot.
It was rare, but occasionally the women who were with us guards in this way got pregnant.
Then we thought up some accusation and killed them.
I saw that with my own eyes.
A woman was pregnant.
She already had a big belly.
A guard had got her pregnant.
While she was pregnant the guard hung the woman from the branch of a tree and cruelly beat her to death with a whip.

Geneva

...friend from North Korea, Donghuyk Shin, who used to be also a political prisoner, was born in a prison camp in North Korea and was finally able in 2005 to escape and we are very happy to have you with us here today.
Thank you for inviting me to this conference.
According to officials figures from the South Korean government around two hundred thousand prisoners are currently interned in North Korean camps.
I think there are around twenty, thirty thousand inmates in Camp 14, where I lived.
My parents didn't know each other before their time in the camp.
My father received my mother as a reward for good forced labour.
They were married by a guard.
That's how it came about that I was born in the labour camp.
It was clear that I would have to live there until I died.
Camp 14 is a death camp, nobody is released from there.
We knew that we had to obey the guards unconditionally.
In all the years I was there,
I never saw anyone complaining.
I'm an American journalist.
Do you speak English a little bit?
A little?
I want to make an interview with him
in a few words about his personal ...
Through my work with LINK, a
human rights organization
I have been to lectures
all around the world.
In the United States, Canada,
Europe and even Japan.
But I never felt in any of these
places that I really arrived.
The public executions in the camp
weren't restricted to adult inmates.
That could happen to children too.
I was seven or eight.
Every week our teacher checked our pockets.
There were around thirty-five
children in the class.
The teacher called out some names
and searched the pockets.
Once a few grains of corn were
found in a girl's pocket.
When we stole food, we usually
swallowed it immediately.
But she was unfortunately caught.
The teacher put the grains on the
table and the girl had to kneel.
She was beaten mercilessly with a cane.
It started at eight o'clock in the morning and
only ended at around one in the afternoon.
He ignored her begging and
her pleas for forgiveness.
He kept beating her.
It was a form of training for him.
I was beaten like that too once.
At the end the girl couldn't cope with it anymore
and she collapsed on the floor unconscious.
We took our friend on our
back and carried her home.
She had a severe head
injury and was bleeding.
The next day she wasn't in school anymore. Since the teacher ordered us to get her from home, we sought out her family. We just heard she was dead. The wound on her head had become infected. When we watched this scene none of us thought that was anything wrong with it. Those were the camp's rules and regulations. That's why we thought that was absolutely normal that this girl was punished so severely for five stolen grains. Sometimes we laughed. I don't know exactly how often that happened. I was quite naive as a small child. I didn't have any ambition so I talked and laughed a lot. In the camp everyone watch everyone. That was the rule. I had to spy on my parents and my parents had to monitor me too. If there were any suspicions I had to publicly criticized my parents in the ideological assembly. I was 14 when I came home that day, my brother was there too. He wasn't allowed to be there. He was meant to be at work. My mother and my brother were talked in quietly. I eavesdropped on that conversation. It turned out that my brother had left from the cement factory. Now he was asking my mother for advise. If my brother were caught he'll be shot because he left the factory without permission. My mother told him that he mustn't stay with her. "You must to hide in the mountains or flee from the camp as quickly as possible." I heard her said that. When I overheard this conversation I felt a little hurt. My mother put a small portion of our daily
food rations back for emergencies
and on this day she cooked
the portion of rice for my brother.
I was hungry every day.
But she didn't give me any.
That's hurt me.
I don't know.
Maybe it was just because I
reported them to the teacher.
I ran to the teacher and said that I suspected that
my mother and my brother want to flee at night.
Before I told the teacher I
tried to negotiate with him.
I suggested two conditions.
I said that "I had something
important to say,
so could you make sure
that I could get a good meal?"
And also I wanted to be the
But he didn't keep his promise.
I was so naive.
you been angry on your mother that she chosen
your brother for this escape and not you?
I don't know.
I'm not certain today whatever they were
really hatching a plan to flee from the camp
thinking about it now.
But I was young, 14.
I felt that they wanted to try and flee.
I did what my instinct, the rules required.
I reported that plan.
But thinking about it now
I can't be certain that they
really wanted to escape.
But it was clear that my brother had
secretly fled from the cement factory.
That's why I reported the
plan to the teacher.
But it's all over now.
I had to go through a tough
time because of this incident.
I was very resentful towards my
mother and brother at the time.
But I try not to think like that anymore.
I try to do the opposite.  
I think I need a break.  
I can't manage anymore.  
Can we stop here? It's  
very exhaustive for me.  
If someone else had seen them  
escaping had reporting them to the teacher  
it wouldn't have been so bad for me.  
Allow had someone else reported them  
I probably wouldn't have survived  
because my father and I would  
have been accused just standing by  
and watching them escape  
without doing anything.  
How would my father have  
the audacity to keep it secret?  
We would definitely have become  
the victims of the public execution.  
Despite to all of this I reported  
the offense to the teacher  
and so my father and I were  
at least able to stay alive.  
Please translate what I said.  
After I reported them that night  
I was arrested in school the next day.  
I was taken away in a truck.  
I had to wear a blindfold,  
so I couldn't seen anything.  
It was pitch-black.  
I didn't know where I was going.  
It wasn't until I arrived  
to a large building,  
then I knew I had been  
deported to the camp prison.  
The cell was very small.  
The area was only big  
enough for me to lie down.  
There was a hole in the corner.  
That was the toilet.  
The cell had a cement floor.  
They took me to the interrogation room.  
My eyes were blindfolded.  
Two people started interrogation me.  
When ever they asked me anything
they always screamed loudly at me.
They kept beating me on the head.
But I was little. They would probably scared
of hitting me too hard and killing me.
Then they started screaming at me again.
I was a little boy.
They frightened me.
They kept asking me the same questions.
Why did my mother and my
brother hatch a plan like that?
Why did they want to flee
from the labour camp?
What had my family plotted?
They asked these questions
over and over again.
They kept beating me.
Then they pulled me up to the ceiling
and they tortured me with fire.
I don't know what other people think
when hear about being tortured with fire,
but in my case they bound my
hands and feet with a rope.
Then they pulled me up
with my back to the floor.
And then they made a fire on the my back.
Is it true that prisoners
are tortured in the camps?
Torture? That's nothing special.
It's completely normal that torture
happens there. It's the norm.
And not just in the penal camps
for political prisoners.
Every time a suspect is arrested,
he is tortured.
We used water torture as
well as fire torture.
We had a torture chamber.
It was a huge aquarium.
The inmates are lowered into water by a
rope, all the way to the mouth.
I had a pedal I could
operate with my foot.
When I pressed the pedal, the prisoner
was fully immersed under water.
I was able to regulate with my foot how deep he was immersed in the water. The pain of suffocation and the fear of drowning are unbearable.

What did they done with the rope and water? This water torture, what does it means water torture? Is it okay if I answer that question later?

Although many years is past, I don't want to remember these experiences anymore. I wouldn't worry if I had only been beaten in the prison. I still have the scars of my torture and the burns. That's why keeps coming back when I start talking about it. Beatings were standard part of life in prison. Of course I was beaten. Look at my arms. My arms aren't normal. They have bent and deep formed.

Before I was tortured my arms were straight. And not just my arms. My legs and the rest of my body too. When I was tortured my arms were tied up with a rope and pulled backwards. That made the more and more bent. I'm so angry when I see the scars on my body when I take a shower. Why do I have to have such deep formed arms? Why do I have to have these scars? I'm not just angry because I'm talking about it right now. I'm filled with anger when I standing front of the mirror and look at my body after a shower. I don't have healthy arms like other people. And I can't wear shorts in summer because
I have so many scars on my legs because I was tortured. And really angry about that. Later I told the guard that I have reported my mother to the teachers, so why was I've been punished? It turned out that the teacher never mentioned that. He didn't tell the truth. They finally brought me to a double cell where there was an older man. He was a stroke of good fortune for me. The wounds from my burns were. He cleaned them without once pulling a face. He was much older than me. I can now say that it's thanks to his help that I survived. I wasn't able to move for quite some time. During that time he even help me to go to the toilet. He help me a lot. Even in such a desperate situation. I learned from him in that cell what I would never be able to experience outside of the prison. I was 14 and for the first time in my life I got human affection. Up until then I never experience help from a person and I really liked how that emotional support felt. I had never felt before that human beings could be social animals. I didn't know that people could support each other like this in life. One day the guards came into our cell in the morning and gave me the clothes back. My friend the older man in my cell wished be all the best. He told me all the best. You must survive. Those were his last words. I was taken to prison on
the 6th of April 1996.
The torture started the same day.
I was released on the 29th of
November, that's same year.
I was in that prison for around 7 months.
I was taken to the same
interrogation room that
I have been in immediately after my arrest.
My father was there too.
That was the first time I realised
that my father have been arrested
and taken to the prison
at the same time as me.
I hadn't heard about him the whole time.
We were released and taken away in a truck.
We drove for a while.
I couldn't see anything because
we were blindfolded again.
Then we arrived in some
place and had to get out.
When they took off the blindfold
I saw that was the public execution site.
Lots of people were gather there.
My father and I had to
stand in the front row.
Then we saw that was the execution
of my mother and my brother.
Our release deliberately
took place on this day.
So we could watch this tragedy.
I saw with my own eyes.
I saw with my own eyes how my mother
and my brother were publicly executed.
My mother was hang and my brother was shot.
I didn't feel anything because for
my whole life the concept of family
had been completely alien to me.
I felt nothing when they were killed.
I thought that they deserved it
because the offence they commit it.
Instead I felt myself getting angry.
I was angry at my mother because
I thought that was her fault
that I had had to suffer so much in prison.
I can't quite remember how my father reacted. I didn't pay much attention to him. I think he cried. I felt sick. But I think my father had tears in his eyes. You could cry? No, not at all. I hadn't learn that you suppose to cry when your mother is executed. All I had learn is that you have to report disobedience because otherwise you made a mistake. That's why I didn't see the need to cry when my mother was executed. I didn't feel in the slightest bit guilty, even though I killed so often there. After the execution of a regular criminal, we were given special rations: a bit of meat and two bottles of alcohol. In the penal camps for political prisoners there is no such reward system. When we had shot someone, we thought it was the right thing to do... to protect our country. That's why I thought it was normal. If we didn't want to get our hands dirty, we chose a group of inmates.

I said: or I kill all of you." Why should I make myself dirty and see blood on my hands. There were easy ways. I just waited until one of the inmates in the group was beaten to death... by his fellow inmates. - Shin! - Hello! Headquarters of LiNK (Liberty for North Korea) - Hi. Good to see you.
Hi, Shin.
How are you?
Thank you. Good.
Good?

Shin’s been working with LiNK for probably since the end of May 2008. We heard his story and I was flew to United States and he went on a tour around... round the US and told the story basically in house parties. And in 2009 he came back up more permanently.

Tell his in front of governments around the world.
A story that validates why a lot of us are here.

In summer 2004 a new inmate came to the camps factory. I had never seen him before. He was moved to my work group. We worked together.
He was a lot older than me.
God, I tell stories like an old woman.
He told me a lot about his life.
Stories about his life outside of the camp.

How he had lived there.
He was so lively and happy when talked about it.
In contrast to him I had been born in the camp and spend my entire life living as an inmate.
That's why he told me about the outside world in detail.
He was very proud of the life he had left before he came to the camp.
But I had never experience that world and couldn't understand all that.
I heard that he slept in a bed and I heard about the house he have lived in.
He told me about programs he watched on television and heard on the radio.
And that he'd travel to China once. Things like that. I didn't know that world. I never seen it. Not even heard about it. I just had no feelings about it. The stories about the food awaked my curiosity. He had eaten meat at a barbecue. He had eaten chicken. That was something I wanted. Just the fact that you could lead a life like that. There wasn't much to talk about in the labour camp. But food was a subject that all inmates were hugely interested in. That's why I was so curious to hear his stories about food. Finally the idea of attempting an escape griping in me. I wanted to check what the world he told me about really existed. I wanted to see with my own eyes this world existed. I imagined the greatest things. For the first time in my life I wanted to get out of the camp. One day and told him that I wanted to escape and experience the world he had told me about. The reason why I wanted to escape wasn't freedom. I wasn't thinking about freedom. Even if I would to be shot tomorrow because I was trying to escape I at least wanted to eat a piece of chicken. A cook meat. Just once in my life. I wanted to eat rice until I was full. That was all I wanted. On the second of January 2005
we went to the mountain to get firewood.
I knew the place very well.
The edge of the camp with
the electric fence wasn't far away.
We couldn't see any guards around
and ran to the fence.
My friend began to climb.
He got an electric shock and
died on the barbed wire.
His body pulled the wire down
and there was a gap.
I was able to crawl through
the fence over his back.
I felt an electric shock on my lags.
My shins were burned.
But I didn't have time to see to my wounds.
I was lucky. I was out.
It's a shame that we didn't both
manage to escape from the labour camp,
didn't both survive.
On the other side of the
fence I just kept running.
I just wanted to get away.
My only thought was to
get away from the camp.
The first morning in
freedom was a big shock.
The picture of North Korea
that I saw that morning
was a big shock for me.
I saw people running around
freely, talking and laughing.
They weren't under surveillance.
Nobody had to salute to police
officers when they walked past.
They were all wearing colourful clothes.
Clothes they like wearing.
It felt to me like this world was happy.
I could hardly believe it.
I could hardly believe that the
world in front of my eyes existed.
It is very hard for me to describe
this first scene in North Korea
after I escaped.
It was paradise for me.
If I found an empty house
I went in to steal something.
I didn't know at the time what money meant.
Then I saw how people use
paper to get food and other things.
When I found an empty house
I went in to steal food or clothing
or sometimes a bit of money.
It was winter and I needed cloth.
While I was there I heard
about this country, China.
It was dusk when I reached
the border river Tumen.
The river had frozen over.
So it was easy to cross the river.
That's how I got to China.
At the time North Korean refugees
could cross the river
without any great difficulty.
They were hardly any soldiers about.
It has become very difficult now.
What I find extremely regrettable
is that I didn't even
smile once at my father
before running away.
He must had suffer terribly.
Beating, torture.
Maybe he was shot for my escape.
Maybe he's not alive anymore.
Do your son know what you have
done in North Korea in the prison camp?
Of course I'm going to tell
my little boy everything I did.
When he's old enough and
can understand it okay.
My boy doesn't know much about North Korea
yet and I don't want to intimidate him.
He's still in primary school.
When he goes to secondary school,
I'll tell him the truth.
What I did and what job I had in North
Korea, how North Korean society works...
and why Daddy fled to South Korea.
It won't be too late.
But I think at the moment
it would be much too early.
Korea could be re-united sometime.
To be honest, I'm scared.
I could meet the people I tortured.
If they're still alive.
When I think about it,
I'm overcome by guilt.
Why did I behave that way?
We're all equal human beings.
Where's the ash tray?
Can we open the window?
I have to tell you about
it in South Korea now
but if I don't do it, someone else will.
Everything has to be discussed by
the international public. Openly.
There are many details to talk about
and many different eye-witness reports
have to be addressed in every aspect.
I didn't want to give
this interview at first.
I didn't want to say anything because
I'm not doing anything for my image
with this interview, but if
I don't do it, someone else will.
I was twenty-one, twenty-two.
I had stars on my shoulders.
I felt as if I was floating above the
clouds. I also always had a gun on me.
I wasn't scared of anything.
I just had to follow the inmates
and if I didn't feel like it anymore
I just shot them.
A human life in the camp was worth
the same as that of a fly.
Nobody ever told me I was
wrong for shooting someone.
Everything's like that in the
penal camp for political prisoners.
I never wanted to give an
interview like this one.
I'm seeing friends tonight.
A lot of us are meeting up together.
Some people avoid me because
they're scared of me.
I remind them of the old times.
In my uniform I looked
worse than the Gestapo.
I made light of it because
that's what I had been taught.
If you don't smoke, I won't either.
This is the last time.
After this interview I'll never talk about
my time in the camp again.
When it comes to my body
I live in South Korea.
But in my mind I still live in the camp.
I still feel like I hadn't quite
manage to leave the camp for good.
I would like to return
to North Korea, my home,
to a labour camp for prisoners.
I want to live in the
home where I was born.
I want to farm there and live
of the fruits of my own labour.
Even if I'm just eating corn.
If the border to North Korea ever opens up
I want to be the first
to travel back there.
I want to live in the
camp where I was born.
When I lived in the labour camp
I had to suffer a lot of pain.
I had to go hungry and put up with
beatings and punishment
because I didn't do my work well enough.
But in South Korea you have to suffer
when you don't have enough money.
It's exhausting. It's all about money.
That makes life tough for me here.
When I think about it I rarely saw
someone committing suicide in the camp.
Life was hard and exhausting
and you were an inmate in whole life.
In South Korea many people
attempt suicide, they die.
It may look like the people
here don't want to anything.
They have clothes and food.
But there are more people committing
suicide here than in the camp.
There are news reports
about that every day.
What do you miss of the life in
North Korea? What do you miss?
I miss the innocence and
the lack of concern I had.
In the camp where I lived
I had a pure heart.
I was really naive.
I didn't have to think about anything.
I didn't have to think about the power of
money and about solving problems with money.
I have to in South Korea.
Although I don't miss
everything from that camp.
I miss the purity of my heart.
I don't know how else to say it.
I miss my innocent heart.
There are currently 200,000 inmates
incarcerated in North Korean labour camps.
- LeslieFuckingMiller -