

Battle between the Two Koreas in Vietnam: An Analysis of Participation in the Vietnam War by the North Korean Psychological Warfare Unit and Propaganda Leaflets*

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to illuminate the veracity of deployment of the North Korean psychological warfare unit to the Vietnam War and its activities. With the South Korean troops as its target, North Korea deployed over a hundred psychological warfare troops every year, beginning with the first unit of four dispatched in June of 1966. The North Korean psychological warfare unit produced and distributed propaganda leaflets and materials; taught the Vietcong the Korean language and means to abduct South Korean troops; operated Korean-language broadcasts; and conducted data investigation and radio monitoring. The most noteworthy of said activities was the distribution of propaganda bills. An analysis of fifty-eight propaganda bills collected at the time demonstrates forms as diverse as writing, photographs, drawings, and a combination of writing and photographs (or at times writing and drawings). The contents involved propaganda regarding the characteristics of the war, instigation of anti-American and anti-government struggles, stimulation of nostalgia and decline of morale, and inducement of defection to North Korea. The illumination of North Korean participation in the Vietnam War is a crucial facet of better understanding the significance of the Vietnam War in contemporary Korean history as well as the security conditions of the Korean peninsula in the 1960s and the 1970s. Essential will be ongoing research on the North Korean involvement in the Vietnam War, a subject that has remained relegated to the sidelines thus far.

Key words: Vietnam War, North Korea, Psychological Warfare, Participation in War

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1. Introduction

The division of the Korean peninsula in 1945 became further solidified as a result of the Korean War, leading to a continuation of military stand-off between the two Koreas divided by the military demarcation line. However, said stand-off was never completely limited to the Korean peninsula; instead, it expanded beyond the peninsula into Vietnam, with the North Korean deployment of its own troops in response to the South Korean participation in the Vietnam War.

Thus far, studies have not delved into a discussion of such a North-South stand-off in Vietnam as a result of North Korean participation in the Vietnam War because most details regarding the participation by North Korean troops remained occult. As even aspects as fundamental as historical facts could not be verified, an in-depth study on such a subject was rendered virtually impossible. Consequently, North Korea's place in the history of the Cold War on the Korean peninsula and its participation in the Vietnam War have hitherto remained mere obscurities in research thus far.

In such a research milieu, this study aims to bring to light the historical facts concerning the North Korean participation in the Vietnam War. Owing to the limitations in data as well as the restriction on the paper length, the current study focuses on a particular unit—the psychological warfare unit—in place of examining the overall picture of the North Korean participation in the war. That the North Korean psychological warfare unit directly implemented strategies with the South Korean troops stationed in Vietnam as its target is noteworthy, for it plainly demonstrates the manifestation of military stand-off between the two Koreas. Moreover, because the North Korean psychological warfare unit left a large body of data, it proves useful in approaching the current research.

This study aims to understand the realities of the North Korean psychological warfare unit deployed in the Vietnam War by examining the records of South Korean troops, intelligence documents, captured North Korean documents, and collected propaganda bills. In addition, the study seeks to verify the central message North Korea intended to disseminate to South Korean troops by analyzing the contents of the propaganda bills, the representative method undertaken in

psychological warfare. By such means, the study will evaluate the accomplishments and meaning of the participation of the North Korean psychological warfare unit in the Vietnam War.

2. Deployment and Activities of the Psychological Warfare Unit

a) Conditions of the War Participation

The singular purpose of the participation in the Vietnam War by the North Korean psychological warfare unit was the South Korean military present in Vietnam. Annually, South Korea deployed more than 320,000 troops to Vietnam, a number second only to that of the United States. The number of stationed troops was around 50,000 at its highest every year. Assigned a Tactical Area of Responsibility, the South Korean military executed the Pacification Operation, protecting the people in the area from the Vietcong and promoting the stability of the assigned area. The strong ideological and political characteristics of the strategy sphere of the Vietnam War naturally intensified the role of civil affairs operations, psychological warfare playing a part stronger and more effective than ammunition.

From the perspective of North Vietnam and the Vietcong, the presence and activities of the South Korean troops were elements that could not be ignored, and the practical need to effectively withstand them had been manifest. However, they lacked the ability to operate a sophisticated psychological warfare fashioned on high-level Korean language skills and a clear understanding of the cultural leanings of the Korean troops. Against such a backdrop, the interests of North Korea and North Vietnam—states that upheld the cause of socialist internationalism through the lens of which they needed practical experience—overlapped, and North Korea dispatched troops that would engage in psychological warfare in the Vietnam War.¹⁾

1) Kim, Ilsŏng, "Supporting the Struggles of the Vietnamese People is the Sacred Internationalist Duty of Communists (Conversation with the 203rd Brigade, DPRK Army, on October 19, 1966)," *Kim Ilsŏng Chŏngnip* vol. 37 (Pyŏngyang: Chosŏn rodongdang ch'ulp'ansa, 2001), 373-384.

The deployment to Vietnam of the North Korean psychological warfare unit had already been proposed immediately upon the dispatch of South Korean combat forces in October of 1965. As soon as South Korea's combat force aptly named "Tiger Division" and its second Marine brigade, "Blue Dragon Division," arrived in Vietnam, propaganda bills in Korean could be found, and radio broadcasts in Korean were heard. However, as the radio broadcasts originated in Hanoi, the capital of North Vietnam, and the propaganda bills in Korean most likely produced and distributed by the Vietcong, the participation of the North Korean psychological warfare unit was still but a conjecture.

In April 1968, however, the United States military stationed in Vietnam captured North Korean documents, and on May 30, 1968, the "White Horse Division (the ninth infantry division)" captured more than one hundred-twenty pieces of North Korean documents during operation, leading to the discovery of the specific contents of the North Korean participation in the war.²⁾ The captured documents recorded in detail the settlement of the North Korean psychological warfare unit and its direction of operation, contents of activities, strategies, and problems.

According to these documents, the first psychological warfare unit consisting of four people arrived in Gia Lai Province, located in the vicinity of where the South Korean troops were stationed, in June 1966. Additional soldiers arrived, and by December 1967, the unit consisted of thirty-five people.³⁾ Including the troops that were replaced throughout the entirety of the Vietnam War, the annual average appears to have been at least one hundred troops. That at the time, North Korea sought to deploy more soldiers for psychological warfare but was limited in exercising its vision due to language barriers can be ascertained in the diplomatic documents of Romania.⁴⁾

The North Korean psychological warfare unit called itself the "Propaganda Expeditionary Force" or the "Propaganda Contingent on Expedition," while the South Korean troops called it the "North Korean Operation Team." The unit

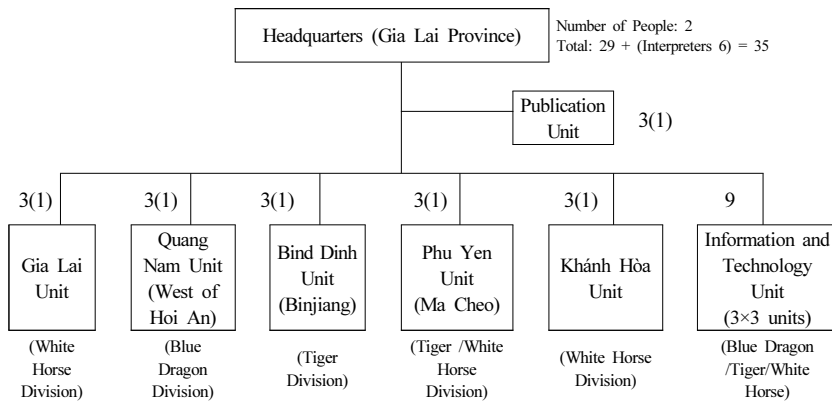
2) Che-9 Sadan, *Detailed Report on the White Horse Strategy No. 6*, 1968.

3) Headquarters of Republic of Korea Forces in Vietnam (ROKFBV), *The Vietnam War and the Activities of the North Korean Psychological Warfare Unit*, 1968, p.9.

4) "Telegram from Pyongyang to Bucharest (July 6, 1967, Telegram No.76.247)," Romanian document confirms North Korea sent troops to Vietnam (2011).

established its headquarters in Gia Lai Province and five forward units, each consisting of four soldiers, to enact disintegration operations against the three brigades (“Tiger Division,” “White Horse Division,” and “Blue Dragon Division”) stationed throughout five provinces. To support the activities of said forward units, North Korea established a publication unit and an information and technology unit. Figure 1 shows the organization of the North Korean psychological warfare unit.

Figure 1. North Korean Psychological Warfare Unit (after December 1967)⁵⁾



At the time, the North Korean troops frequently appeared within or in the vicinity of the areas in which South Korean troops were stationed. The areas of appearance were concentrated in Quang Nam, a region directly south of seventeen degrees north latitude, which divides Vietnam into North and South, Quang Tin, Quang Ngai, Bind Dinh, Phu Yen, and Plei Ku. Outside these regions, the North Korean troops also made appearances in Binh Duong, located north of Saigon, the capital of South Vietnam.⁶⁾ At the time, the South Korean presence consisted of its command in Vietnam and construction support corps as well as the navy's

5) Headquarters of Republic of Korea Forces in Vietnam (ROKFV), *The Vietnam War and the Activities of the North Korean Psychological Warfare Unit*, 1968, p. 9. The numbers indicated inside parentheses are those of interpreters.

6) Headquarters of Republic of Korea Forces in Vietnam (ROKFV), *The Vietnam War and the Activities of the North Korean Psychological Warfare Unit*, 1968.

transportation unit and the air force support unit. The locales in which the North Korean troops made their appearance evince that the psychological warfare unit was dispersed throughout the regions where the South Korean troops were stationed to executed psychological warfare operations against the South Korean troops.

b) Details of Activities

North Korea inserted the Korean term *Chökkong* in the titles referring to units executing psychological warfare. *Chökkong* (적공 or 敵工) is an abbreviation of “*Chökkun wahae kongjak*,” or “Operations for the Disintegration of Enemy Troops,” defining psychological warfare as that which is meant to disintegrate the enemy. As expected, the activities of the North Korean psychological warfare unit in Vietnam were concentrated upon the disintegration of the South Korean troops.

Based on the captured documents, the duties of the North Korean psychological warfare unit consisted of the following four aspects: propaganda operations intended for disintegration, organization of political struggles and instruction for the execution of activities, raids and obtainment of experience thereof, and collection of military intelligence. To do so, the following five strategies were employed: publication and distribution of propaganda bills and booklets, Korean language education, kidnapping of the captives of the South Korean military, execution of Korean-language broadcasts, and data research and radio monitoring.⁷⁾

Examining these aspects in detail demonstrates that the publication and distribution of propaganda bills and booklets was the most representative strategy. Propaganda bills are a means of communication through which to relay one's messages to the target audience and change it to behave in the manner one sees fit. An examination of the captured documents shows that the quantity of the published propaganda bills reached 223,371 bills in the thirteen months from June 1966 to June 1967. The figure combines the 181,793 bills put together by the psychological warfare unit stationed in Vietnam both by the headquarters (133,834)

7) “Comprehensive Report on Activities (July 20, 1967),” Captured Documents C (May 30, 1968).

and the forward units (47, 559), and those that were prepared in North Korea and distributed in Vietnam (41,978).⁸⁾ Applying such figures to the entirety of the Vietnam War leads to the hypothesis that at minimum, 1 million propaganda bills must have been distributed by North Korea: equal to three bills per South Korean soldier who participated in the Vietnam War, as there were approximately 320,000 South Korean troops participating in the war annually.

Second, the Korean-language education for the Vietcong was conducted because the psychological warfare executed by the Vietcong until then had failed to see fruition due to the language barriers. North Korea established the Korean Language Training Center and, selecting trainees between the ages of eighteen and forty with a minimum of middle-school education, provided lessons on Korean for a month or two.⁹⁾

Third, the kidnapping of South Korean soldiers was enabled by the North Koreans who trained the Vietcong in kidnapping captives and established teams specifically geared toward kidnapping South Korean soldiers. According the captured documents, only those members among the Vietcong special forces and reconnaissance units with at least three years of war experience were selected to be trained in the Korean language, kidnapping methods, martial arts, and general knowledge of the South Korean military.¹⁰⁾

Fourth, Korean-language broadcasts were undertaken by North Korea. These broadcasts can largely be divided into the “Sounds of Vietnam,” a program that liaised North Korean broadcasts with ones from Hanoi and executed via speakers in the vicinity of the South Korean military, namely “fireline” broadcasts or propaganda (*hamhwa* or literally “loud announcements”).¹¹⁾ The ultimate purpose of such broadcasts was to provide misinformation and induce defection as well as to lower morale.

Fifth, the North Koreans conducted data research and radio monitoring. Data

8) Headquarters of Republic of Korea Forces in Vietnam (ROKFBV), *The Vietnam War and the Activities of the North Korean Psychological Warfare Unit*, 1968, p.22.

9) “Direction of Actions undertaken by the Quảng Ngãi Unit,” Captured Documents E (May 30, 1968).

10) Headquarters of Republic of Korea Forces in Vietnam (ROKFBV), *The Vietnam War and the Activities of the North Korean Psychological Warfare Unit*, 1968.

11) “On the Project for the Disintegration of the South Korean Puppet Army,” Captured Documents A (May 30, 1968).

research was focused on collecting and analyzing the data necessary for the disintegration of the South Korean military as well as essential to the Vietcong experience of the struggle, propaganda, political struggles, and military strategy formation, and then providing such data to the Vietcong.¹²⁾ Such activity was also needed for the accrual of war experience for the North Korean troops in the future. Moreover, the North Koreans monitored radio communication by the South Korean military and alerted the Vietcong as to the contents of said communication.

To execute the strategies discussed above, North Korea obtained a wide variety of equipment, including recording devices, loudspeakers, lithographic press, typewriters, mimeographs, xylographs, radios, cameras, and movie cameras. In addition, North Korea received protective custody and logistics support from the Vietcong to ensure a smooth execution of the strategies.¹³⁾

3. Analysis of Propaganda Bills

a) Conditions and Characteristics

In military terms, psychological operations are those that “deploy spies and signifiers to influence the sentiments, rationality, and motivations of the target nation in order to achieve the purposes of the military strategies and ultimately to systematically affect the target nation’s governmental, institutional, organizational, and individual behaviors.”¹⁴⁾ From this perspective, psychological warfare is often understood to be persuasive communication, invisible war, or “paper explosives.”¹⁵⁾

In psychological warfare, propaganda bills are the most representative tactic. In

12) Headquarters of Republic of Korea Forces in Vietnam (ROKFV), *The Vietnam War and the Activities of the North Korean Psychological Warfare Unit*, 1968, p.22.

13) Headquarters of Republic of Korea Forces in Vietnam (ROKFV), *The Vietnam War and the Activities of the North Korean Psychological Warfare Unit*, 1968, p.8.

14) *Dictionary of Joint Combined Operations Military Terminology* (Seoul: ROK Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2010), 211.

15) Young Hee Kim, “Persuasive Communication of Propaganda Leaflets during the Korean War” *Han’guk òllon hakpo* 52, no. 1: 306-333; Yunkyū Yi, “The Korean War and the Psychological Warfare: On Propaganda Bills, the Inaudible Gunshots and Paper Bullets” *Han’guk kũnhyōndae misul sahak* 21: 130-148.

the bills are the messages the agent intended to communicate to its target and the expected response from the target. As such, the propaganda bills distributed by North Korea during the Vietnam War prove to be meaningful measures by which to understand the messages North Korea sought to send to the South Korean military and the changes in behaviors and thought processes of the South Korean military expected by North Korea. As the collected propaganda bills represent only a portion of those that were distributed at the time, the verification of the overall characteristic remains limited. Nonetheless, the bills prove to be a useful tool with which to identify a general tendency and to understand the stand-off between the two Koreas in Vietnam.

The propaganda bills distributed by North Korea during the Vietnam War show several identifiable characteristics in terms of the agent of production, localities, contents, and form. First, the agent of production and localities can be divided into the bills that North Korea produced in North Korea and those that the psychological warfare unit produced in Vietnam. The bills that were transported from North Korea show higher-quality paper and printing than those produced in Vietnam. Such discrepancy is due to the fact that in North Korea, the bills were produced with the use of a systematic printing process, but in Vietnam, they were produced by means of xylography, lithography, and mimeography, leading to black-and-white bills with crude prints.

Because the target of the propaganda bills was the South Korean military, the bills were produced in Korean, and contained contents and pictures inherently suited for the cultural sensitivities of the South Korean troops. The North Korean military clearly stated the agents of the propaganda bills as follows: “The Central Committee of the Frontlines for Liberation of the Korean People in South Vietnam,” “Alliance of the Korea People Living in Indochina,” and “Central Committee of the Frontlines for the Unification and Democracy of Korea.” The recipients, on the other hand, were identified as “Dear South Korean soldiers!” and “Dear members of the Blue Dragon Brigade,” following the production rules of the North Korean propaganda bills.¹⁶⁾

16) “On the Project for the Disintegration of the South Korean Puppet Army,” Captured Documents A (May 30, 1968).

The forms of the propaganda bills were diverse as well. An examination of the captured documents and collected bills shows that among the 223,371 bills produced between June 1966 and June 1967, there are 81,328 regular bills; 3,978 New Year's greeting cards; 804 letters; 4,195 small booklets and slogans; 96 pictorials; 132,550 handkerchiefs; and 420 miscellaneous items.¹⁷⁾

b) Analysis of the Contents of the Propaganda Bills

What were the specific contents of the propaganda bills North Korea distributed with the South Korean troops as the target? This study examined fifty-eight bills housed at the National Archives of Korea and the Institute for Military History. The figure includes fifty-four bills at the National Archives of Korea and fifteen at the Institute for Military History, with the subtraction of the eleven that overlap.

The forms of the fifty-eight bills are diverse, ranging from writing, photographs, pictures, a combination of photographs or pictures and writing, and musical scores. Among these, writing-focused bills number thirty-seven, followed by pictures and photographs at thirteen, musical scores at seven, and calendars at one. Those bills that contain a combination of writing and visual aids are divided into either writing or pictures, dependent upon the proportion of the two elements. In terms of color, there are twelve bills in color and forty-six in black-and-white, the latter being four times as many as those in color. Eleven contains the phrase "Security Pass."

The contents in the collected propaganda bills range from the political and ideological—defining the characteristics of the Vietnam War, instigating anti-American sentiments, and developing anti-government struggles—to the excitation of nostalgia, encouragement of defection to the Vietcong and North Korea, and provision of information regarding the war. Though some single bills contain singular messages, most present contents that are concomitant of the aforementioned.

Categorizing the fifty-eight bills into subjects leads to the following: six bills depicting the characteristics of the Vietnam War, nine bills instigating anti-American sentiments, five developing anti-government struggles, seventeen intensifying love

17) Headquarters of Republic of Korea Forces in Vietnam (ROKFV), *The Vietnam War and the Activities of the North Korean Psychological Warfare Unit*, 1968, p.21.

of family and nostalgia, thirteen encouraging defection, five providing information, and three miscellaneous types. In particular, the three miscellaneous bills contain criticisms—such as “Do not kill cows.”—against the damage heaped upon the Vietnamese citizens during the execution of strategies by the South Korean military.

Table 1. Subjects and Contents of the Propaganda Bills

Categories	Characteristics of the Vietnam War	Instigation of Anti-American Sentiments	Instigation of Anti-Government Struggles	Stimulation of Love for Family and Nostalgia/Decline of Morale	Encouragement of Defection	Provision of Information	Miscellaneous	Total
Number of Bills	6	9	5	17	13	5	3	58
Notes	Ideological and Political Contents (20 Bills, 40%)			Personal Matters (30 Bills, 52%)		9%	5%	100%

The subjects and contents of the propaganda bills distributed by North Korea are similar to those of the propaganda bills spread by the North Korean and Chinese armies during the Korean War.¹⁸⁾ Moreover, they align with the captured North Korean “Plans for Propaganda Operations.” In “On the operations to disintegrate the South Korean military stationed in Vietnam” captured on May 30, 1968, during the execution of strategies by the South Korean military, the North Koreans delineate the five directions and contents of their propaganda operations: ① We must explicate the fundamental characteristics of the Vietnam War (the U.S. as the invader and a common enemy of the people); ② We must describe the basic rationale behind the deployment of South Korean troops to Vietnam (the manipulative tactics on the part of the U.S. to instigate intra-Asian struggles, to use the South Korean troops as receptacles for bullets, and the South Korean president Park Chung-hee’s intention to maintain his position and obtain funds); ③ We must use slogans and bills that prohibit crimes such as murder, arson, destruction, rape, *et cetera*; ④ We must instigate doubts and regrets about the war and the military vis-à-vis nostalgia, pessimism, fear of war, sanctity of life, and regrets over needless deaths; ⑤ We must encourage anti-war struggles including avoidance of battle, struggles to return home, and misunderstanding

18) *Propaganda Bills during the Korean War*, ed. the Hallym University Center for Asian Cultures (Seoul: Hallym University Press, 2000).

between the U.S. and South Korean militaries. Such factors demonstrate that North Korea had already postulated the specificities of the messages it sought to communicate to the South Korean troops and the anticipated behaviors by the South Korean troops, thereby systematically executing its strategies to disintegrate the South Korean military.

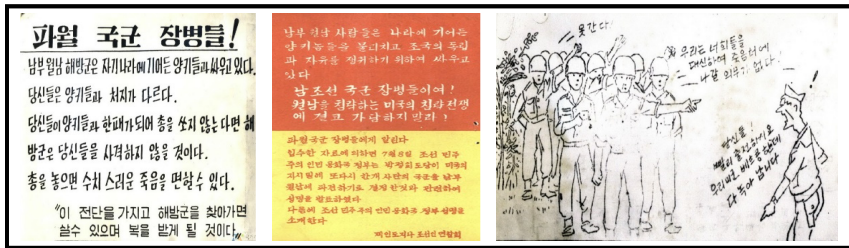
The subjects and contents of the propaganda bills show that the message that North Korea sought to communicate to the South Korean troops was as follows: the Vietnam War is a war of invasion; South Korean military must not involve itself in this war of invasion; and anti-American, anti-government sentiments coupled with struggles to return home must be instigated via the excitation of misunderstandings between South Korea and the U.S. from top to bottom. In addition, North Korea sought to degrade morale and desire to participate in battle by exciting sentiments of nostalgia and love of family back home and to encourage struggles against the South Korean military and defection to North Korea for the purpose of survival. In the following sections, the study will closely examine the following three contents of the propaganda bills: ① ideological and political matters; ② personal matters; and ③ provision of information.

1) Ideological and Political Matters

Among the propaganda bills that North Korea distributed, those that can be categorized as containing ideological and political matters number twenty, or 34% of the total bills examined. In this category are the contents that define the characteristics of the Vietnam War, instigate anti-American sentiments, and encourage anti-government struggles.

The focal points of such propaganda bills define the Vietnam War as a war begun by a U.S. invasion and warn against in-fighting among the Asian race. By extension, the bills alert the South Korean troops to the criminal activities of the U.S. military within South Korea, designating the U.S. as the common enemy of South Korea and Vietnam. Moreover, the bills communicate, “We the North Korean troops will not shoot you, the South Korean troops, unless you shoot first,” and “There is no need to die for the Yankees,” as the South Korean troops in other regions had supposedly refused the order to fight given by the U.S. On a

bill with the phrase “A Wife’s Greatest Desire” is delineated a wife’s wish that her husband, participating in the war in place of an American soldier, would soon escape from the war.



Other propaganda bills aimed to create a division between the South Korean troops and the South Korean government and thereby instigate anti-government struggles and the fight for return home. Such bills claimed that the Park Chung-hee administration colluded with the U.S. to drive the South Korean soldiers into war as “receptacles for bullets,” and depicted the high-ranking government officials back in Seoul as partaking in decadent banquets while the parents of the South Korean troops deployed to Vietnam remained despondent. In so doing, North Korea sought to lower the South Korean troops’ determination to go to battle and create internal division between the South Korean government and the troops.



2) Personal Matters

The majority of the propaganda bills concern personal matters, comprising 52% of all bills examined, or thirty in number. Most stimulate the troops’ love of family

and nostalgia as well as encourage the troops to defect to North Korea. By stimulating such sentiments, North Korea sought to degrade morale and the desire to fight, and thereafter to encourage defection to the North by emphasizing contents closely related to physical and material benefits.

The deployment of the South Korean military to the Vietnam War was the first international deployment since the establishment of the Republic of Korea. Those soldiers stationed far from away from home in a strange, foreign land and plunged into life-or-death situations felt a strong sense of nostalgia for home and family. Though there were exceptions, at the time the South Korean troops were deployed for a year in Vietnam. And nostalgia was their greatest weakness. Clearly understanding this aspect, North Korea sought to take advantage of the weakness by persuading the South Korean troops to think of their families back home and therefore refuse to fight with urgency, and, by extension, defect to the North as a measure of saving their own lives.

Among the propaganda bills, those that stimulate nostalgia are seventeen in number, comprising the largest portion of all singular subjects. In such bills were contained not only written materials, but also photographs, pictures, and musical scores that were utilized to stimulate nostalgia. Some contents worth noting are as follows: a young girl dressed in *hanbok*, or the traditional Korean dress, and taking a bow, with the phrase “Happy New Year!” written above the photograph; a woman under the full moon saying, “I cry every night because I miss you so dearly.”; a woman nursing a crying infant with the phrase “When you cry, my heart that misses your father so much also cries...”; photographs that evoke love between a man and a woman; and questions such as “Other women’s husbands have all returned. Where are you?”



Musical scores with lyrics were also employed in six of the propaganda bills. Most of the songs are of nostalgia and lamentations for a particular situation wherein one finds oneself. A song titled “Thoughts of Home,” for example, contains the direction, “Sing with a longing heart.” Its lyrics lament, “Why have I come here to die for a yankee, leaving behind my home town, thousands and thousands of miles away? I have pitifully thrown away my precious youth to the jungle.” “The Southern Cross of a Southern Country” sings of those who were conscripted for forced labor mobilization in Indochina during the Japanese colonial period, depicting their longing for home while looking at the Southern Cross; the song was popular in South Korea as well. In addition, North Korea advertised such songs as new releases by real South Korean singers such as Hyönmi and Park Chae-ran, confusing the South Korean troops stationed in Vietnam into believing that these songs actually originated from South Korea.



Propaganda bills with such contents urge South Korean troops to defect to the Vietcong and to North Korea; there are thirteen such bills. The contents are as follows: standardized table of reward for defectors created by North Korea and written materials released by the North Korean government; and the names and photographs of those South Koreans who had already defected to North Korea. Further, some bills contain the slogan, “Let us defect to the Liberation Army and go to the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea!” along with pictures. A song titled “Thousands of Miles from Home” by the famous songstress Yi Mi-ja was re-written to include the lyrics, “Ah, I can go home only if I find the Vietcong,” persuading the South Korean troops that defecting to the Vietcong was a way to

return home. Most of the bills encouraging defection contain a “security pass” that ensures physical protection and stable living conditions for all those who bring the bills when they defect.

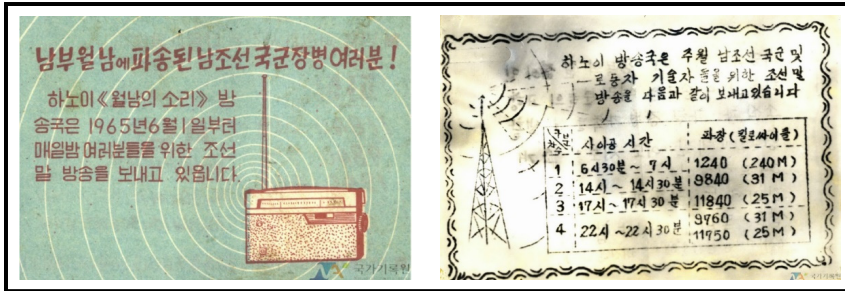


3) Bills that Provide Information

Five of the bills examined illustrate cases of North Korea utilizing propaganda bills to provide certain information to the South Korean troops. Though some of the information contained in such bills is factual, others are not. Representative of the latter case are the bills that “advertise” the contents of the Korean-language radio broadcasts released by North Korea, comparisons of salaries for troops of each country that deployed its military to Vietnam, and statements by North Korea. A few simply contain the calendar for 1966, then the new year.

The bills concerning the Korean-language radio broadcasts contained contents of the broadcasts sent out by North Korea from Hanoi. At the time, North Korea undertook Korean-language radio broadcasts in Hanoi, the contents of which concerned political discourse, criticisms of U.S. policies, criticisms of the South Vietnamese governments, propaganda for North Vietnamese policies, and Korean songs.¹⁹⁾ In such bills, North Korea introduces the broadcast “Sounds of Vietnam” as a Korean-language broadcast that will begin on June 1, 1965, and contains information regarding the broadcast times and radio frequency. Moreover, they depict the target of the broadcast as South Korean troops and “skilled laborers” in Vietnam.

19) *Comprehensive Examination of the Vietnam War*, ed. Chuwolsa chŏnggildan (Seoul: Chuwolsa chŏnggildan, 1974), 931.



Also contained in such bills are contents regarding comparisons of pay for the troops of all the nations that had deployed their military to the Vietnam War. These comparisons were employed for the purpose of informing the South Korean troops that they were paid less than the troops of other countries. Through the comparison of the salaries of soldiers from the U.S., the Philippines, Thailand, and South Korea, for example, these bills sought to emphasize the fact that the salaries for South Korean troops were the lowest and that such low pay indicates that “the U.S. uses the South Korean troops essentially as free labor and thereby kills two birds with one stone.” Other bills are strictly informative in nature; they contain core North Korean statements regarding South Korea and the Vietnam War as well as decisions rendered by the North Korean military committee.

4. Accomplishment and Significance of the Participation of the Psychological Warfare Unit

Psychological warfare is often referred to as “invisible warfare.” The participation of the North Korean psychological warfare unit in the Vietnam War transported the military standoff between the two Koreas since the Korean War from the Korean peninsula to the frontlines of Vietnam. In such a way, the invisible war between North and South Korea continued in Vietnam. As examined thus far, the North Korean psychological warfare unit was small, consisting only of thirty-five people maximum, but it executed various psychological warfare strategies by establishing several forward sub-units that dealt with South Korean

troops on an individual basis and distributed propaganda bills that directly targeted South Korean troops.

How might we evaluate the accomplishments of the participation of the North Korean psychological warfare unit in the Vietnam War? We may do so vis-à-vis the messages contained in the propaganda bills distributed by the North Korean unit and the ensuing behaviors undertaken by the targeted South Korean troops. In addition to the propaganda bills, we may refer to the kidnapping of South Korean soldiers, Korean language training, and intelligence activities executed by the North Korean psychological warfare unit.

In examining said aspects, we see that though North Korean psychological warfare reaped some accomplishments, such accomplishments are not significant. The messages that North Korea sought to communicate to the South Korean troops stationed in Vietnam had reached the South Korean military on the Korean peninsula. As such, the South Korean military began to pay attention to the North Korean participation in the Vietnam War. In fact, when two South Korean soldiers disappeared in Vietnam only to be found later in P'yŏng'yang, North Korea made grandiose announcements regarding the South Korean soldiers' voluntary defection to North Korea. Such defection illustrates the success, however partial, of the distribution of propaganda bills and kidnapping of captives executed by the North Korean psychological warfare unit.

Overall, however, it proves difficult to view the activities of the North Korean psychological warfare unit as successful because the results that North Korea expected via their distribution of propaganda bills and the messages contained within—e.g. struggles to return home from Vietnam, defection to North Korea, anti-American struggles—did not materialize to the extent to which North Korea had anticipated. Such a lack of luster was due to the counter-activities undertaken by the Headquarters of Republic of Korea Forces in Vietnam (ROKFV). In 1969, the South Korean military established strategies to arrest North Korean agents within the directives for the ROKFV, announced reward measures for capturing North Korean agents alive, and engaged in distribution of propaganda bills encouraging North Korean troops to defect to South Korea in the name of the ROKFV.²⁰⁾ Moreover, the South Korean military established and operated the

Korea Forces Vietnam Network (KFVN) to counter the psychological warfare executed by North Korea. Such countermeasures impeded the North Koreans from garnering the type of success they had envisaged in engaging in psychological warfare.

Among the captured documents, the “Comprehensive Report on Activities” by the North Korean psychological warfare unit reflects the lackluster results of its disintegration strategies geared toward the South Korean troops.²¹⁾ Moreover, that North Korea continued to train pilots even after the withdrawal of its Air Force Combat Unit but did not continue to train, at least officially, the psychological warfare unit, provides further rationale for evaluating the results of the psychological warfare as less than successful.

On the other hand, the participation of the North Korean psychological warfare unit in the Vietnam War bears significant meaning vis-à-vis the history of the Vietnam War as well as that of the Cold War. From the perspective of the former, the studies on the Vietnam War thus far have tended to focus on the deployment of the South Korean troops to the war. As the deployment of the South Korean troops to Vietnam was the first international deployment of the South Korean military since the establishment of the Republic of Korea, its locus in contemporary Korean history looms large. However, the North Korean participation in the Vietnam War has seldom, if ever, been a subject of discussion, and as an extension, the realities of the participation of the Communist Bloc in the war have not been examined. In such a way, the North Korean participation in the Vietnam War proves meaningful as a subject through which new perspectives may be illuminated regarding studies on the Vietnam War.

Second, the North Korean participation in the Vietnam War is significant in terms of the history of the Cold War as well. The Vietnam War was a significant moment in world history during which, following the Korean War, the Cold War manifest itself as the “Hot War.” Vietnam was the stage upon which the two Koreas that had duelled each other on the frontlines of the Cold War as the primary agents of the Korean War met again for yet another stand-off amidst the larger

20) *Chuwolsa Hullyŏng* 69-1, 1969, pp.40-41.

21) “Comprehensive Report on Activities (July 20, 1967),” Captured Documents C (May 30, 1968).

confines of the conflict between the Free World and the Communist Bloc. That both Koreas deployed their troops to such a nexus of global confrontation must not be ignored in the history of the Cold War on the Korean peninsula.

Particularly noteworthy are the “counter-measure” characteristics inherent in the participation of the North Korean psychological warfare unit. In contrast to North Korea’s deployment of its Air Force, anti-aircraft unit, and corps of engineers to North Vietnam for the purpose of gaining hands-on experience, the dispatch of the psychological warfare unit was strictly intended to counter directly the South Korean troops that had been dispatched to Vietnam. In such a way, the invisible war between the two Koreas expanded beyond the limits of the Korean peninsula and manifest itself within the territory of a foreign nation. Such a perspective may prove useful in understanding North Korea’s military provocations—the so-called military adventurism—undertaken on the Korean peninsula during the same time period.

5. Conclusion

The effort to illuminate the participation of North Korea in the Vietnam War is significant in reaching a better understanding of the locus of the Vietnam War in contemporary Korean history as well as the security situations on the Korean peninsula in the 1960s and 1970s. To the author’s knowledge, this study is the first academic discussion of the participation of the North Korean psychological warfare unit in the Vietnam War and an effort toward the illumination of the historical realities of the North Korean participation in the Vietnam War, a subject that has thus far remained on the periphery.

However, the limits of this study are also defined by the lack of clearly delineated facts by North Korea. In the future, North Korea and Vietnam must engage in a detailed divulgence of the facts regarding not only the participation of the North Korean psychological warfare unit, but also the footsteps of the entire North Korean military in the Vietnam War. Until such a juncture, the current study is relegated to remain unfinished. Moreover, when North Korea and Vietnam open

their historical realities, efforts toward the re-evaluation of the history of the Cold War on the Korean peninsula as well that of the Vietnam War must be undertaken.

Often, a significant aspect of the studies on Cold War History is considered to be the enhanced understanding of the erstwhile opposition. In order to more clearly understand the history and realities of North Korea, its participation in the Vietnam War and the military stand-off between the two Koreas in Vietnam need to be examined. Such an understanding needs in turn to effect the obtainment of accurate facts for each Korea and the mutual understanding based on a more proper evaluation of historical realities; only then can the two Koreas move beyond the historical trauma of the peninsular division and step toward the future. In such a milieu, it is my hope that the current study can fill the void in the research arena by shedding light on the military stand-off between North and South Korea during the Cold War in Vietnam and ultimately serve as the stepping stone to move past the trauma of the division toward reconciliation.

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