



Memories of the Korean War

I was a good soldier. One time, at a demonstration, our Major was asking us soldiers what should we do if our rifle jammed. I confidently raised my hand and explained to him and the rest of the soldiers what to do. He was so pleased with me, 'Congratulations, soldier! What is your name?' At one point, I was transferred to be trained in demining, which I believe is the most dangerous task in the army because you are always combatting against danger. Your death, when dismantling a mine, is only one mistake away. One time, we had heard of an officer who was training soldiers in demining; in his demonstration, he was using an old heavy mine that was used for heavy vehicles. As he was explaining this type of mine, he stood on the mine to make the point that this mine was for heavy vehicles; when he began jumping on it, it exploded, killing him and injuring others. I do not know whether this really happened- it could have- or the army used this story to reinforce how dangerous our work was.

Our Company was asked who wished to go to Korea; at the time, the war was still on. What did I know about Korea? And why would I want to go? I did not volunteer. I heard many of my peers had come forth. One day, three of my officers came to see me; they encouraged me to volunteer. Although I tried to explain to them my reasoning, they started their reply by complimenting how good of a soldier I was. As we to-ed and fro-ed in our conversation, they continued by saying it was my duty to Greece for me to go. Then, they played the political card, 'If you don't go, you may be labelled as a communist...'

I do not know how my choice could have anything to do with political ideology-didn't it cross their minds that I

may not have wanted to go because I did not want to get myself killed- but the world was (now) deep into the Cold War and everything was about politics. So, I put my name down. Can you believe that I was the only one chosen from my Company! The ones who wanted to go were not selected; I did not want to go and I was chosen. What fate!

One very fortunate event that had occurred was by the time my Company arrived in Korea, an armistice between the two sides had been agreed upon. Hostilities had ceased!

Although the fighting was over, the terrible evidence that Korea had experienced a brutal war was everywhere. The countryside had been devastated! Everything had been flattened, whether it was a forest or village. It was like we had landed on another planet! It was lifeless! As there was no greenery, there were no animals around too.

I spent fourteen months in Korea! I may have wanted to return home but that decision was up to my commanding officer. With the armistice, the 'clean up' began! There were so many areas to demine! It was a long process for us; we would locate the mines, dig a moat around them. Then, someone else would come to clear it. It was so dangerous. Fatalities or injuries are an accepted part of this process. I was very lucky to have survived this awful work.

With war, there is so much poverty. One of the saddest episodes is the way poverty-stricken women practically threw themselves at you... for some food. One time, I was awoken from my sleep- it was around 11pm, 'Stathakopoule! Stathakopoule!' I did not know what all the commotion was all about. When I got to where all the noise was coming from, I saw before

me a large group of Korean women. They were as naked as the day they were born! These women were willing to sleep with soldiers for some food! I felt so ashamed! These women had suffered enough, and were still suffering; but to exploit them in this way was simply unacceptable. I had sisters at home; these women had families too. I did not take in his sad episode.

Another time, I was on guard in a trench. It was in the middle of the night. A young Korean woman approached me. In her limited English and Korean accent, she said, 'I am good girl. I do good sex!' She said this a few times. I did not want any of this; to scare her away, I hit her foot with the butt of my rifle. She scrambled... In my fourteen months there, I never got to go to Tokyo, Japan, for leave. There was an opportunity for to go but my place was taken by one of our officers.

I knew my stay in Korea was temporary; although I missed home, and my family, I knew I would see them again. When I was finally leaving, I bought so many gifts to my family, whether they were beautiful bedspreads or tea sets.

I was glad I was coming home.

One of the reasons why I finally agreed to go to Korea was that I was told that if I wanted to migrate to the USA, my tour of duty in Korea would really help my application. It was meant to be a sure thing! When I returned to Greece, I did go to the Department of Immigration to apply for migration to the USA and I did state I was in Korea. The reply I got was, 'Everyone wants to go to the USA, everyone wanted to go to the USA. There are no places!'

From dreams of going to America, I migrated to Australia in 1956.