



DAYBREAK, 25 JUNE 1950, TAESŎNG-TONG, KOREA

The rooster crowed and warned the evil spirits of the night that it was time to leave, but the thunder-like roars still rumbled in the background, ignoring their cry. Kyu yawned, stretched, and carefully got out of bed to begin his chores, not wanting to wake his wife and daughter. Korea may be known as the Land of the Morning Calm, but this day wasn't starting that way. He heard more rumblings in the distance, and there were numerous lightning-like flashes in the dawn's early glow. Outside, the earth was wet, so it had rained during the night, and the storm remained still growling in the distance. Kyu left the house, fed the goats and chickens, and hitched the oxen to the yoke to start another day on the farm. His wife and daughter would be up soon to make breakfast. His mom always slept late on Sundays, so she would not be stirring yet. His stomach growled at the thought of Nabi's warm cooking. The thunder-like rumble grew, accompanied by a mechanical rattling noise sounding somewhat like a train. No normal storm made noises like that.

As Kyu walked from the barn, the foot-tall *ssal julgi* (rice stalks) in the *non* (rice fields) waved gently in the water, fertilized by human and animal dung. Woo Kyu-Chul and his ancestors have raised rice on this farm outside of Taesŏng-tong for centuries. His grandfather was here when the Japanese *jjokbari* invaded in 1910 and built the Gyeongwon

railroad. It ran from Seoul, the new capital in the south, through Kaesŏng, the old capital west of here, to Wonsan in the north. Maybe the mechanical sound was a new type of train? Kyu didn't know, and it didn't seem to be threatening, so he continued with his chores.

During his grandfather's day, the Japanese *wae-nom* did not tolerate disrespect and would harshly discipline at the least infraction. His grandfather did not like the *wae-nom*, and they tortured and killed him as an example. His grandmother survived somehow and raised their only child, his father, under the Japanese watchful eye until he turned fourteen. Then the *wae-nom* took him away to be educated. He returned three years later and soon married a local girl. Kyu was born not long after in 1932. When Kyu turned ten, his dad was taken again to enlist in the Japanese army. That was because he refused to change his Korean name to Japanese. Kyu has been the head of the Woo household ever since. He never saw or heard from his father again.

After that, Kyu's *Eomma* (mom) raised Kyu by herself. Using her meager earnings, she hired help to keep the farm productive and teach Kyu traditional Korean values and ethics under the Japanese watchful eyes. The *wae-nom* required everything in school be taught in Japanese, but *Eomma* made sure the farmhands taught Kyu Korean history and culture. They even taught him Hangul, the Korean alphabet, which was illegal. The farmhands also taught him how to defend himself the Korean way using tae kwon do. Even under Japanese occupation and high taxation, they survived. Certainly there were times during the occupation when they had to mix barley with the rice to make a meal because the Japanese took the rice. There was even a short period when they had to eat chicken feed *gijang* (millet). But they always had enough to get by. Then the Japanese were defeated in 1945, and things became better.

When Kyu turned fifteen, *Eomma* knew he would need help on the farm. Kyu's interests turned to more than just animals and farming. It was time to find Kyu an *anae* (wife). *Eomma* worked within the Woo clan and picked out a suitable bride for Kyu from Kaesŏng before he turned sixteen. When he met her, Kyu thought Nabi was the most beautiful butterfly that he had ever met. He fell madly in love with her.

A year later, the *seon* (arranged wedding) occurred at the house of Nabi's parents at dusk. Grim-faced and hiding his emotions, Kyu rode to the house on a borrowed horse while his *girukabi* (wedding

leader) and groomsmen walked. When they arrived, he presented Nabi's mother with a *kireogi* (wild goose) and bowed twice in respect. Geese mate for life, so Kyu was promising a long life of love and care for Nabi. It was a traditional *kunbere* (wedding ceremony) with both Kyu and Nabi wearing gilded *hanbok* dresses. A *samulnori* percussion quartet played before the ceremony, and Nabi's sisters performed a *buchaechum* (fan dance). Kyu was seventeen and Nabi sixteen when they were married as calculated by the traditional Korean method for determining age. They sealed their vows by bowing and sipping wine in a gourd that Nabi's mother provided. After the wedding, Nabi moved in with Kyu on the family farm. Through their love, their daughter Sa-rang was born, with the traditional blue Mongolian birthmark on the small of her back. Kyu thought he would work the farm in peace with Nabi and Sa-rang forever now that the Japanese were gone.

The end of the war in 1945 split Korea in two, with the Russians accepting the Japanese surrender north of the 38th parallel and the United States accepting it south. Taesŏng-tong straddled the line between the two countries but fell under control of the south. Kyu didn't much care. He paid his taxes and worked the farm—raising two oxen, a couple of goats, and some chickens with Nabi and their young daughter Sa-rang—and left politics to others. They had relatives in the South who claimed Syngman Rhee, president of the Republic of Korea (ROK), would make them all rich and that Premier Kim Il-Sung from the North, or the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), would take everything away. His cousins in the North said just the opposite. Kyu didn't believe either side. He was just glad that the Japanese were defeated and he could raise his family in peace on the centuries-old farm. Sure, there were stories that the North wanted to reunite Korea by force and rule the entire peninsula, but Rhee also claimed he was the rightful president of all of Korea. He had heard the stories that the ROK Army fought off several North Korean attacks. Many were killed—they said maybe as high as ten thousand died in these skirmishes during the past year—but Kyu didn't know anyone who had perished and the closest episode had happened over by Kaesŏng in May last year. These events seemed to be happening more frequently along the border to the east but not around Taesŏng-tong.



Kim Il Sung



Syngman Rhee

Unknown to Kyu, Kim Il-Sung aspired to reunite the Korean peninsula by force. Issuing a manifesto on 8 June 1950, Kim proclaimed elections be held throughout Korea early in August for seats in a new parliament to meet in Seoul on 15 August, the fifth anniversary of the liberation from the Japanese. This parliament would establish a government for a united Korea with Kim elected as premier. With the help of the Soviets, he planned to ensure this destiny by massively invading the South. He expected an immense popular revolt to simultaneously arise across the South to spread the quick collapse of the ROK government. So under the pretext of holding military training maneuvers, he deployed 90,000 soldiers (with another 45,000 in reserve) supported by 150 Soviet tanks near the 38th parallel. And on Sunday, 25 June at 4:00 a.m., just when Kyu was getting up, they opened fire and started advancing south along the entire peninsula. Unbeknownst to Kyu, his small village of Taesŏng-tong would straddle the divide between ideologies for the next sixty-plus years.

The North Korean People's Army (NKPA, or *Imun Gun*) was well prepared by the Soviets. Up to fifteen Soviet advisers were embedded within each infantry division to provide training and

guidance. Their equipment, though not always new, was a mixture of Soviet and Chinese products and was well maintained. Their large howitzers could shell far in advance of their infantry. The NKPA even controlled a small air force of forty fighters, seventy attack bombers, sixty YAK trainers, and ten reconnaissance planes. Thousands of spies and saboteurs infiltrated the South to wreak havoc and destroy key installations in advance of the army attack. Many of the NKPA troops were veterans of the Chinese Revolution of 1949 and war with the Japanese. They had seen many atrocities and would soon participate in more of their own.

The Republic of Korea (ROK) Army, though they did not realize it, was woefully ill prepared to meet this onslaught. Abandoned by the Allies after Rhee's election, only a handful of American military advisers and observers helped the South Koreans. The American government feared arming South Korea as they felt Rhee might choose to invade the North. Hence, the ROK equipment was a hodgepodge of World War II leftovers from both the Americans and the Japanese armies. They had no tanks and only light artillery. Their air force consisted of ten advanced AT-6 trainers and twelve liaison-type planes. Of the sixty-four thousand soldiers in the ROK Army that Sunday morning, only thirty-four thousand, considered the best, faced North Korea. The rest were scattered throughout the South, training in small unit tactics and chasing guerrillas.

Just then, three trucks filled with armed soldiers, menacing in appearance, bounded up the road in front of Kyu's farm and headed north. As Kyu watched them pass, he noticed billowing clouds of smoke in the distance in the dawn's brightening glow. The lightning he saw earlier was coming from those clouds. The sounds must be explosions and not thunder. It must be another North Korean rice raid, but this incursion from the North was bigger and closer than the others. Though rattled, Kyu still had to check the *jebang* (levees) around his rice paddies before breakfast to make sure that the rodents hadn't breached them and lowered the water. Otherwise, his rice would die.





DAYBREAK, 25 JUNE 1950, CAMP CHICKAMAUGA, BEPPU, KYUSHU, JAPAN

For Donnie Matney, Sunday mornings in the army were the best. Unless deployed on maneuvers, Sundays were always relaxed. Sure, he still had to get up for reveille, but here in occupied Japan, army life was different. Since the dropping of the atom bombs and the total dismantling of the Japanese military economy, the Japanese people had nothing, and the US government (and thus, the army) didn't worry about Japan and Asia. The world powers believed the Soviet Union was now the enemy, and they would soon attack West Germany and take over Europe. Japan was beaten. China wasn't a threat. Europe was much more important to protect than any country in Asia. So the Nineteenth Regiment of the Twenty-Fourth Infantry Division performing occupation duties in Japan received few supplies and new equipment from the States. They had to improvise, and the easiest way to improvise to everyone's benefit was to employ the Japanese civilians to do things. By January 1950, when Donnie arrived, the army employed the Japanese to do just about everything—cooking, cleaning, gardening, and even guard duty was performed by the Japanese on base.

Donnie couldn't believe army life at Camp Chickamauga. Being fresh from boot camp at Fort Riley, Kansas, and only passing through Fort Lawton in Seattle, Washington, Japan was his first real posting.

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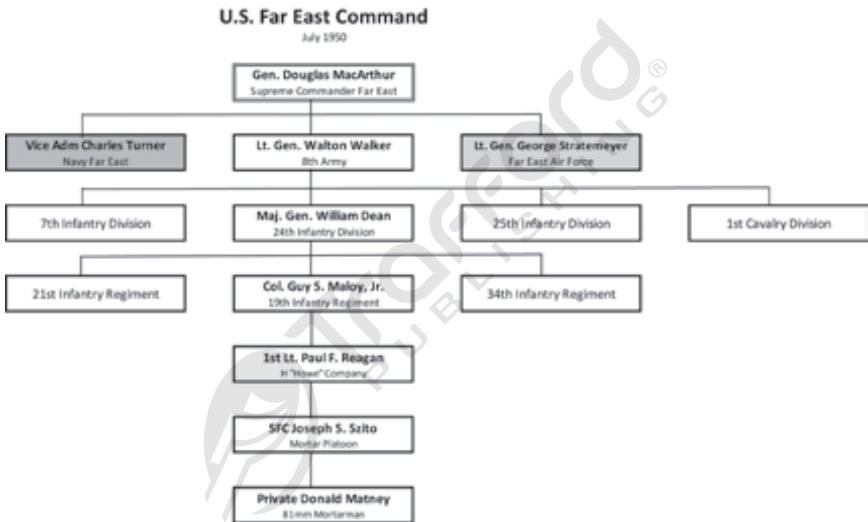
The many days spent on the troopship traveling from Seattle to Japan were horrible. Most of the soldiers in transit spent the entire trip hugging the rails, seasick. Everyone on board thought that they would be assigned a tough billet in the real army upon arrival in Japan. They expected to end up working their butts off—more so than during their eight weeks of basic training. That thinking could not have been more misguided. When Donnie finally arrived on 4 January 1950, he reported to base and was assigned to Howe Company to become part of a four-man 81 mm mortar squad. When he checked in with Sergeant First Class Joseph Szito that Wednesday, the sergeant told him to go find a bunk, settle in, and meet at the mess hall at 1800. So he walked into the barracks expecting it to be empty in the middle of a Wednesday afternoon. Instead, he found most of the bunks full of snoozing GIs. When he asked what was going on, he was told “Welcome to the life of a Chick.” As the Japanese did everything, there wasn’t much to do most afternoons, except sleep, write letters, and listen to the armed forces radio station.

Donnie soon learned the glorious history of the Nineteenth Regiment. Formed in 1861, the Nineteenth was known as the Rock of Chickamauga due to the strength and courage of its enlisted men who successfully defended their position during the Civil War battle at the West Chickamauga¹ Creek in Georgia. For over three days in September 1863, 65,000 Confederates battled 60,000 Union soldiers resulting in over 34,600 combined casualties. Near the battle’s end, a lowly second lieutenant assumed command of the remains of the Nineteenth Regiment when the other officers were killed or wounded. Under his command, they held their position at Horseshoe Ridge, providing enough time for the rest of the Union Army to form new defensive positions in Chattanooga thus earning them their moniker. The regiment later fought valiantly in the Indian Wars, World War I, and in World War II, where they were deployed from Hawaii and Australia to help liberate the Philippines.

Colonel Guy S. Meloy Jr. commanded the Nineteenth Regiment in Japan in 1950. Along with the Twenty-First and Thirty-Fourth Regiments, the Nineteenth Regiment was part of the Twenty-Fourth Infantry Division, the Victory Division, symbolized by a taro leaf insignia worn on every soldier’s shoulder. The Twenty-Fourth

1 *Chickamauga* roughly translates to “river of death” from its native Cherokee language.

Infantry Division was commanded by Major General William F. Dean. General Dean reported to Lieutenant General Walton H. Walker, Eighth Army Commander, who in turn reported to General Douglas MacArthur, commander in chief of the Far East Command. Howe Company morning reports that Sunday in June listed 120 GIs assigned with 115 on active duty. Though companies were typically led by a captain, Howe Company was commanded by First Lieutenant Paul F. Reagan. Sergeant First Class (SFC) Joseph S. Szito commanded the mortar platoon and was Donnie's direct superior noncommissioned officer. Donnie was pleased to learn that General Dean served as a captain in the Nineteenth Infantry fourteen years previously and that the general always took an interest in the activities of the Chicks.



This late June Sunday, Donnie planned to go to church services at the base chapel and then go fishing. That is, unless one of his buddies could hook him up. Then he would either go roller skating, dancing, or to the movies to entertain a local girl. Most of the privates first class and servicemen with higher ranks had a “moose.” In Japan at this time, families were so poor that they could not afford to feed their children once they became teenagers, so certain arrangements were made. The boys got apprenticeships or jobs in the base and the girls set up apartments with the GIs footing the bill. The servicemen then shackled up with the *musime* (girl) and attended other events with them when they could get off base. And with no regular duties, getting

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permission to stay off base was easy. But Donnie's pay as a buck private wasn't enough to make ends meet and support a "moose." Besides, Donnie had heard the lectures from the chaplain about the evils of sex with the natives and had seen the VD slideshows. So Donnie just entertained when one of his troop mates needed a friend for a friend.

Donnie was born Donald Eugene Matney on 11 April 1932 in Matney Hollow near Seymour, Missouri. He was the eighth of nine children born to Willa McKinley Tarbutton and Silas Floyd Matney. His dad delivered mail to help make money to support the farm. His dad was also a bit of a daredevil and owned an early motorcycle. Unluckily, he died when Donnie was six, and Willa had to move off the farm into the town of Seymour to get a job to support the three youngest children who were still living at home. Donnie didn't remember much about his dad. His older brothers were the ones who taught him the ropes, including how to hunt and fish.



Silas Matney on motorcycle

Growing up in Missouri was mostly fun for a young boy intermixed with work. There were woods to explore and trees to

climb and streams to go fishing and skinny-dipping in (if you didn't mind the leeches). Mostly Donnie liked to hang out with his friends. Seymour, Missouri, was a small farm town of less than one thousand located east of Springfield and known for growing apples. It was a whistle-stop on the Frisco train line and had one stoplight. Starting in 1932, the year Donnie was born, Route 60 jogged through it, bringing a gas station and diner to town. But not much else existed, except the apple orchards and the Carnation milk company. Donnie never traveled much as a kid, but he did go with his mom to visit his big sister and her family in Colby, Kansas, once when he was fourteen. Of course, while they were there, he got a toothache and had to have a tooth extracted. It was just his luck. His one big adventure outside of Seymour and he loses a tooth! They did drive past Fort Riley on the way to Colby, and he saw all the army troops and equipment. That was when he first got the itch to join the army.

It seemed like someone in the Matney family was always in the military. Donnie's great-great-great-grandfather fought in the Revolutionary War with Nathanael Greene in the Carolinas. After the war, he was rewarded with a section of land along the Pee Dee River. He settled there but, after a while, got the itch to explore. So he traded his land in the Carolinas for land in the Missouri territory. That's how Matney Hollow came to be.



Donnie Matney Sophomore in 1949

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During the Civil War, Donnie's great-grandfathers Elijah Matney, James Tarbutton, and Wiley Copley fought for the North in the Webster County Missouri militia while his great-grandfather M. Bryant Ipock, living in Tennessee, may have fought for the South. His dad was in the army for a while but was too old for World War I. His older brother Billy was a tanker in Germany during World War II. Billy had lots of tales of the things he did and saw. Donnie and his good friend Chuck Farr often talked and dreamed about joining the army and getting out of Seymour to see the world. Finally, Chuck said he was going to do it. So Chuck and Donnie went to meet with the recruiter. Chuck was a year older, and he signed up right away. Donnie's mom had to approve his papers. He was only seventeen at the time and had just completed his sophomore year of high school. She agreed because she knew Donnie had the Matney wanderlust and she would no longer have to feed a hungry teenage boy. Besides, what risk was there in peacetime in the army? A younger classmate, sixteen-year-old Joe Peters², drove Donnie and Chuck Farr to the train station on 17 August 1949 for their journey to boot camp at Fort Riley. Little did they know that it would be the last time all three friends would be together.

The eight weeks spent at Fort Riley in basic training passed quickly. Having spent most of his youth outside, Donnie was in good shape and didn't have any problems with calisthenics. He also did well at the range as he had a rifle at home and hunted to help supply meat for the family. They also poked and prodded him, examined his teeth, gave him shots, and took chest X-rays to check for tuberculosis. When he first arrived, he was a wiry 120 pounds on a five-foot, eight-inch body. The drill sergeants called him lots of names during basic training, mostly deriding his red hair and rail-thin frame. When he left, he was a solid 132 pounds. The drill sergeants also stopped yelling derisive nicknames and started calling all the soldiers GIs.³ Donnie

2 Joe Peters lived a full life in Seymour, Missouri, had a shotgun wedding, got divorced, then married his high school sweetheart. He died after he learned that Donnie had been found. He was buried the same day in the same cemetery where Donnie was reinterred.

3 *GI* originally came from the words *galvanized iron* that were stamped on the metal equipment used by the Cavalry in the late 1800s. By World War II, it was adapted to mean "government issue" as all soldiers completed the same basic training.

didn't see much of Chuck during basic, but they both made the trip from Fort Riley to Fort Lawton and then on to Japan. Donnie was assigned to the Nineteenth Infantry Regiment. Chuck got hitched to the First Cavalry Division as an armored reconnaissance crewman. They tried to stay in touch, but it was difficult as they were stationed on different Japanese islands. First Cavalry was deployed to Honsho around Tokyo while the Nineteenth was deployed south on the island of Kyoshu. Donnie planned to visit Chuck and see Tokyo the next time he got a three-day pass. They said that the girls there were prettier and more sophisticated than the ones near Camp Chickamauga and were always willing to entertain a man in uniform.

Donnie's time at Camp Chickamauga seemed more like an extension of high school than service in the military. With the Japanese performing most of the mundane tasks at camp, the regiment established all kinds of sports teams just to keep the boys busy and active. General MacArthur was quoted saying, "Upon the fields of friendly strife are sown the seeds that, upon other fields, on other days, will bear the fruits of victory."⁴ Football, baseball, basketball, boxing, bowling, horseshoes, table tennis, softball, golf, volleyball, and swimming were all organized into team sports that the Chicks could participate in. Each team competed against other regimental teams within the Twenty-Fourth Infantry Division. The best players for each sport from each regiment then formed the Big Green Team within the Twenty-Fourth Infantry Division to compete in the All-Japan Championships against the other Eighth Army Divisions.

The army was still an army, and training to fight did occur. The Nineteenth Regiment attended the deliberate defense, attack, and counterattack training sessions in January and March 1950 at the Shimamatsu training area, but that was the only real army training that Donnie attended. He did go to the shooting range every week or so to fire a rifle. He stripped and cleaned his rifle after every time on the range just like he did at home. Not everyone did that. Though everyone in the infantry was to be proficient with a rifle, in Japan, they were not required to shoot and were not taught how to disassemble a rifle and clean it. His squad also practiced with the M1 81 mm mortar. Donnie could hump the forty-five-pound baseplate and help set it up in just over a minute, but they never fired any live

4 *The Organization Day Yearbook of the Nineteenth United States Infantry Regiment*, September 20, 1949

rounds while in Japan. There just didn't seem to be any reason. They did launch a couple of M301 illumination rounds one night over the Camp Chickamauga parade grounds as a lark. They were quite bright, and Sergeant Szito ripped the squad leader a new one when they got caught. Donnie's squad became as proficient practicing with the mortar as could be expected without ever firing a single live round.

The church service in the chapel this June Sunday morning was sparsely attended. Most of the regiment skipped out or spent the night with their moose. God wasn't a priority to soldiers living the good life during peace on occupational duty. Though a Baptist by creed, Donnie liked the nondenominational service preached by the chaplain.

After the service, he went back to the mess hall to get lunch. He was still careful eating as he had his wisdom teeth removed a while back there in Japan and his gums were still tender. While in line, someone said that the armed forces radio had something on it about North Korea declaring war on South Korea. Supposedly, the premier of North Korea, Kim Il-Sung, claimed that South Korea had rejected every North Korean proposal for peaceful unification and had attacked North Korea that morning near Haeju above the Ongjin Peninsula. North Korea retaliated in self-defense and had begun a "righteous invasion." Syngman Rhee,⁵ president of South Korea, was to be arrested and executed. Of course, only a few of the old-timers really knew where North and South Korea were located as the Twenty-Fourth Infantry had been posted there briefly after the war. Most didn't realize that Korea was less than six hundred miles to the west, just across the Sea of Japan.

Donnie ate lunch but skipped desert. He now weighed 142 pounds, the most that he had ever weighed. None of Donnie's buddies needed a friend for company that afternoon, so Donnie went fishing. He caught three nice chub mackerels, which were a new type of fish to him as they didn't grow in Missouri. He let them go.

⁵ Syngman Rhee was also derisively called Rhee-Shung-Man by the North Koreans.