

*Report: The Starving Korean People's Army - the Current Status and Structure*

**<PART2>**

## **Death by starvation in military troops**

It goes without saying that the soldiers struggling with malnourishment are sons and daughters of the general public. On seeing the emaciated soldiers, parents cry, and the public feels sympathy for them. Our internal reporters have seen many sad scenes. Two reporters speak about this in the next section.

### **Parents are Crying**

*Report: by Gu Gwang-ho*

In <redacted> district of Pyongyang, where I live, it is not unusual to see the army walking around the city. Most of them are unhealthily thin. However, I don't think there has been another year where there are as many weakened soldiers as this year (2011). Only the officers seem ok. The appearance of the soldiers who have been in the army for one to three years is really bad. Civilians comment to each other, that they don't know why they would join the army knowing that it can't feed them and that they will become malnourished.

Now, it is said that by region, the troops stationed in Kangwon Province have it the worst. In my town, there is a family whose son was stationed in Kangwon Province. Three to four years after joining the army, he became malnourished and was sent home. According to the son, "(In the army), we only receive a small bowl of potatoes. But the potatoes are so small. "They are so small they look like beans, not potatoes. Those in the army are not supposed to say that the army has no food, but obviously people will talk to those they are close to.

The son of a lady, who lives nearby and sells bicycle accessories for a living, was also sent home due to malnourishment. She wept saying, "Even if he recovered, I would not let him return to the army.

Otherwise he would be killed." Every parent loves their child. After telling their children to go guard the country and sending them off to the army, they become malnourished and are sent home. If this is what happens to them, then it is only natural for people to not let the son you have carefully raised join the army. Almost everyone becomes malnourished one or two years after joining the army. In the worst cases, they become malnourished after only a few months.



*A malnourished soldier being sent home by train. (May, 2005. Photo by Lee Jun) (C)ASIAPRESS*

There are also lots of stories of people joining the army then starving to death. When a soldier dies, the squad informs the parents. When the parents race over, they are told, "He died from diarrhea." But the parents are not stupid, and if they see the corpse, they quickly understand that they died from starvation. This type of story spreads quickly so if it is decided that their son is to join the army, the poor parents cry.

Civilians sarcastically say, "If there is a war, there are different soldiers who will fight in it." I wonder where they are hidden.

Note: Being sent home from your unit is referred to as sick release, and this typically happens when it is judged that the soldier may die if they remain in the unit. This horrible condition is called "3rd degree of sickness". A slightly better condition is called the 1st or 2nd degree of sickness. In these slightly better conditions, the soldier is sent home on the condition that the parents send a few hundred kilograms of food to the army unit, according to internal sources of information.

## **An army that begs; female soldiers' menstrual periods are stopping**

*Report: by Kim Dong-cheol*

Young soldiers have often knocked on my door and asked "Can you share some food with us?" or "Please let us do some work for you." A friend who lives in a different region said that they also often come by his house too, so these "beggar soldiers" seem to be increasing.

In 2011, shortages were not just limited to basic food supplies, but there were also serious shortages of salt. In the army they typically only get salted Chinese cabbage or dried vegetable soup as side dishes, but salt is not properly distributed from their superiors and so they can't salt the vegetables. It seems this has many complaining. So they have money sent from home and they buy salt and artificial seasoning and carry it around in their pocket with them.

The female soldiers are also very thin and pitiful. Many women's shabby uniforms have become loose and baggy. They have lost any womanly roundness. A friend's daughter is in the army and I spoke with her. She said that a while after joining the army, the majority of women become malnourished and their menstrual cycle stops. In fact, if they have their period, they are called to the medical doctor. The doctor comments that most women's menstrual

periods have stopped, and if these women are doing the same things but still have their period, they want to investigate why. That woman said she was sternly instructed not to talk about what happened in the army to those outside the army.

The malnourished soldiers are prohibited from leaving the troops even during their free time. They don't want to disgrace the army in public, but everyone already knows that the army is malnourished.

During the spring when new troops are conscripted, parents sending off their children cry. This is not because they are just sad to see their children go, but they are crying over the situation - that their children will go hungry in the army.

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## **PROFILES:**

### **Gu Gwang-ho**

Gu Gwang-ho is in his thirties and lives in Pyongyang. He started his journalistic activities in 2011 after having training several times as a reporter by ASIAPRESS North Korea Reporting Team. He has made series of reportings in Pyongyang and South Pyongan Province successfully so far. His remarkable video report on starving People's Army soldier in 2011 was aired by many TV stations over the world.

### **Kim Dong-cheol**

Kim is in his thirties and lives in the northern region of North Korea. He started his journalistic activities in 2009 while working as a company driver.

## TO BE CONTINUED IN PART 3

*This report first appeared in the 6<sup>th</sup> issue of the Rimjin-gang Japanese Edition  
(Feb. 2012)*

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osaka@asiapress.org

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