

# **An Unfinished Task of Truth Finding of Cheju Mass Killing Under US Occupation in Peace time 1947 to 1949**

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## **Abstract**

The Jeju events was the Jeju people's struggle to break away from the social evils, to gain national independence, to oppose division of Korea imposed by foreign occupation forces, to gain local autonomy from authoritarian tyranny of the central government. Also, it was an armed insurrection against the US occupation forces.

The Jeju April 3<sup>rd</sup> Events were the series of event, Oppression, Uprising and Grand Massacre in which thousands of islanders were killed as a result of armed clashes between civilian groups and US and Korean government forces. It took place over the period from March 1, 1947, when National Police of US Military Government opened fire on six spectators, and April 3, 1948 Uprising to protest against oppression by the police and Northwest Youth and against US and South Korean Government until September 21, 1954 after the last guerilla captured and when closed areas of Halla Mountain were reopened to the public.

**Keywords :** the Jeju April 3<sup>rd</sup> Events, Oppression, Uprising, Grand Massacre, US, Korean government forces.

1. Long Silence and Deep trauma after Atrocity
2. The US Military Government in Korea's Responsibility
3. Conflicts and Killing Competition between the Army and the Police
4. Organizational Aspects
5. Epilogue

### **1. Long Silence and Deep Trauma**

Debates of the characters of the Jeju April 3<sup>rd</sup> events, or Cheju(Jeju) April 3<sup>rd</sup> Popular Uprising are common these days. The truth about the Uprising was suppressed for 50 long years. The Uprising lasted nearly seven years. It is the most tragic event - after the Korean War - in the 20th century Korea. One camp of

Koreans was brutally murdered on account of their ideology. The people of Jeju-do suffered long even after the uprising was put down. Their wounds and suffering were so deep that their life was forever disrupted.

Although the people of Jeju were illegally subjected to human rights violations, no outsiders had stepped forward to defend the innocent victims of this US-sponsored terrorism. No outsiders were interested in finding the truth, or finding the parties responsible for the massacres, or compensating the victims for the evil deeds done or restoring their civil rights or removing the stain of false accusations. In a word, no detail truth and no practical reparation. For more 50 years, the people of Jeju suffered in silence and suppressed their deep hatred.

In 1960, Kim Sung Sook, a noted native of Chuja Island, Daejung-myun, Jeju-do and a member of the National Assembly, put forth a legislative draft for helping the Jeju victims. But Kim's draft was forgotten in the aftermath of the May 16 Military Coup, 1961 who led by the Korean Army, a major general Park Junghee. At about the same time, Lee Moon Gyu and Park Gung Koo, both Cheju National University students from Jeju-do, conducted limited interviews of several survivors. Shin Doo Bang, Cheju Daily also conducted field research in Jeju. However, their truth activities came to a halt due to military government threats and intervention. Unfortunately they were imprisoned after Military coup, May 16, 1961. No allowed any comments or traditional open ceremony on the events any more.

The 1978 novel *Soon's Uncle* written by Hyon Ki Yung told the story of the massacre of innocent civilians on Bukchon-ri, Chochun-myun, Jeju-do. Other literary works were published on this subject and the 'news' of this unbelievable events began to trickle out in the open. In May 1985, Hanchonryon, Korea Association of University Students made public an article - *The People's Struggle Against the May 10 Election* that asserted that 60,000 Jeju residents were killed. In 1987, Lee Sang Ha, poet published the epic *The Han-ra Mountain* which stirred up people's interest in the events. He was imprisoned later who alleged violation of National Security Law which act took effected after the 14<sup>th</sup> Regiment's October Mutiny, 1948, that was origin of 1948 regime, namely anti-communist right wing regime. No more socialist and/or dissident at that type did allowed within that 1948 regime till now. There were a long silence and deep trauma after atrocity by state violence from the both side US and South Korea.

These literary works were enough to draw general attention of the academic community. Some historians attempted to link the Jeju April 3<sup>rd</sup>(4·3) events and the 1980 Kwangju incident, Democratic movement and explain away the Jeju events, 1948 as an inevitable

consequence of the social conflicts in Korea. The conservative and anti-communist government has labeled the Jeju 1948 incident as "mob riots" or rebellion by Communists and attempted to hide the truth from the people.

According to The ROK *Investigation Report on the Jeju 4·3 Incident*(2003) by National Committee for Investigation of the Truth About the Jeju April 3<sup>rd</sup> Incident from 2000 year and the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission 2004-2008 years, we found that the Jeju communists had no contact with the Soviet Union or northern Korean communists and there was little adherence to the mainland South Korea Labor Party.

I assert that the Jeju events was the Jeju people's struggle to break away from the social evils, to gain national independence, to oppose division of Korea imposed by foreign occupation forces, to gain local autonomy from authoritarian tyranny of the central government. Also, it was an armed insurrection against the US occupation forces.

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## 2. The US Military Government's Responsibility

We must first look into the key roles played by the US Military Government in Korea

(USMGIK). This is necessary in studying the events and circumstances leading to the April 3<sup>rd</sup> tragedy, massacre. The events were a direct result of the USMGIK policies. The US military occupied South Korea in August 1945 and since then forcibly suppressed the Korean people's movement for self-government.

John Merryl, an American expert on the Jeju incident, wrote: "The Jeju People's Insurrection showed that the US Military Government in Korea failed to create conditions conducive to democratic development in Korea. No other people of the world fought so valiantly against the US occupation forces. The US military dissolved the popular People's Committees and empowered the right wingers allowing them to engage in white terror against the people. The US bared its naked imperialism in Korea through brutal military suppression of the democratic elements of Korea."

The period 1945-1946 when people on Jeju Island formed a successful governance based on local people's committees different from mainland. The Jeju People's Committee weredemonstrating that Koreans could govern themselves and remain friendly to the US military under the conditions of support from USAMGIK. The USAMGIK decided for October 1946 to create under its control Interim Legislative Assembly(ILA) only in the US zone, South Korea.

The US troops had overwhelming superiority over the rebels in firepower and manpower and used excessive forces in indiscriminate destruction of life and properties. The US military developed scorched-earth tactics in the Indian Wars. They massacred the Indians and then burned their villages and crops to prevent their resurgence. The US military applied the same tactics against the people of Jeju and many innocent Korean civilians died.

The extreme rightist political ideology of the US Military Government led to the Jeju events. After occupying Korea south of the 38th Parallel, the US military proclaimed a

policy of countering Communism from North Korea, USSR and China. Accordingly, the US military suppressed the leftists on one hand and empowered the rightists on the other. The Korean police working for the US military were told that Jeju was the "Second Moscow" and "The Red Partisans' Island", for example Cho Byung Ok, who was educated in US, then Police commander of USMGIK. The Jeju rebels were labeled "The Mountain men", "The Mob", "Armed Red Bandits" and "Red Dogs".

It is no wonder then that Brigadier Gen. Robert, the first head of the US military advisory group from August 1948, ordered "American-style red bandits extermination" tactics. Major Gen. Dean, the military governor of Korea, stated that Communists who came from outside regions committed the arsons and murders.

One commentator noted that "The main goal of the US anti-guerrilla campaign is to first establish a puppet government and then provides it with military assistance so that the natives will fight among themselves in the name of anti-Communism."

The South Korean delegate to the UN stated at the 3rd UN general assembly : "The Jeju rebellion which began on April 3, 1948 was caused primarily by the faulty regional policies of the US Military Government and unchecked white terrorism committed by the police and the Northwest Youth League (an extreme right-wing terrorist organization)."

I must also look at the global goals of the US, which is world domination and completion of imperialism. The US strategy is to secure markets by military means for its expanding capitalism.

Jeju was a favorite hunting ground of the US military brass and a special airport was constructed for them. When an armed rebellion occurred on the island, Cho Byung Ok, the police chief of the US Military Government, did not hesitate to push for

“immediate military suppression” and the Cho’s idea was embraced by the US military.

“Truth commission confirms civilian killings during war, at least 20,000 people jailed for taking part in the popular uprisings in Jeju, Yeosu and Suncheon, or accused of being communists, were massacred in some 20 prisons across the country.” The US military supported de jure and ordered de facto mass murders of innocent civilians. No evidence of US stoppage, detainments, or holding back massacres has been found.

### **3. US Soldier was onlooking conflicts and killing competition between the Army and the Police**

The situation became worse because of US soldier was onlooking the conflicts between the police and the 9th Regiment stationed on Jeju. On April 28, 1948, Lt. Col. Kim Ik Ruhl, the commander of the 9th Regiment, secretly met with Kim Dal Sam, the “supreme commander” of the guerrilla forces. Kim Dal Sam demanded:

- Stop the unilateral election and government in South Korea
- Disarm the police and remove the army from Jeju
- Disband and expel the terrorist youth gangs
- Immediate release of the detainees
- Immediate cessation of illegal arrests, torture and execution.

In turn, Col. Kim demanded:

- Lay down the weapons and surrender now
- Stop all hostile activities
- Arson and murder are unlawful and any grievances must be dealt with legally

They came to an peace agreement. Col. Mansfield of the US Military Government in Korea approved the agreement.

However, even before the agreement was made public, the right-wingers mounted a

vicious rumor-mongering in order to derail the agreement. It was claimed that “The Regimental Commander was duped by the enemy who is trying to gain some time”, “The Commander has connections with the enemy chief”, and “The Commander intends to fool the rebels into surrendering so that he can wipe them out in one stroke.”

On the day of the meeting, fighting stopped at some locations and there was an island-wide cease-fire within 3 days. More and more rebels surrendered. However, on May 1st (the 4th day after the agreement was reached), a group of youth gangs raided Oh-ra-ri, Jeju-city where many of the surrendered rebels lived and burned several homes.

On May 3, a unit of the 9th Regiment of 7 Koreans and 2 Americans commanded by Lt. Drews (in some reports - Capt. Drews) was escorting 200 surrendered rebels to a detention camp at the Jeju airport when it came under carbine and heavy machine gun fire by unknown hostile forces. The Americans counter-attacked killing five of the attackers and wounded several. The attackers turned out to be none other than the Jeju police!

The Jeju police claimed that the attackers were actually rebels trying to turn the Americans, the army and the police against each other. The April 28 Peace Agreement was scratched after this incident.

On May 6, 1948, an emergency meeting was convened at the US Military Government Jeju Headquarters (located at the Jeju Middle School). Attendees included Gen. Dean (the US Military Governor), Ahn Jae Hong (the Civilian Governor), Song Ho Sung (army garrison commander), Cho Byong Ok (US Military Government police chief) from Seoul, Col. Mansfield (US commander of Jeju), Yu Hae Jin (Jeju governor), Kim Ik Ruhl (9th Regiment commander), Choe Chun (Jeju police chief) in Jeju and others.

At this meeting, Col. Kim Ik Ruhl (36 year old) and Cho Byong Ok (54 year old) exchanged

heated arguments and hurled personal insults at each other. Thus hitherto hidden animosity between the army and the police exploded into the open. In the end, young Col. Kim and the army lost out and the US military and its police ally won the day. Col. Kim was relieved of his command and Lt. Lee Yun Rak (the intelligence chief of the 9th Regiment) was discharged from the army who was communicated with guerilla for peace talk.

This affair illustrates the conflicts between the police and the army and the police's penchant for violence against the Jeju people. Col. Kim stated that the police was not fit to handle the rebels and "I wanted to take over the police."

Cho Byong Ok, the US Military Government police chief, retorted that Col. Kim was trying to discredit the police by spreading false rumors and shouted that Col. Kim was "a Communist youth".

The army archive states that the main causes of the prolonged 'red bandit' suppression were:

- The excessive force used by the police alienated the Jeju people
- The terrorist actions of the Northwest Youth League turned law-abiding residents into rebels
- The lax army discipline turned the residents against the army
- The army failed to win over the residents because of its poor psy-war.

It is evident that those responsible for suppressing the insurrection did not fully comprehend the nature of the revolt and furthermore, there was no agreement amongst them on how best to deal with the situation.

It is true that the army-police friction made the situation worse. But it is also true that the US Military Government bears the main responsibility for the Jeju tragedy. After all, it was the US military which pushed a policy of terror tactics against the people of Jeju.

After the May meeting, the army took over the

bandit-suppression campaigns and followed the US-ordered scorched earth tactics. The police and the youth gangs competed with each other to outdo the army and curry favors with their American masters.

Thus the 'red hunt' spiraled into an unchecked frenzy of killing, raping and burning the innocent people of Jeju under the US military system.

#### **4. US ignored the organizational aspects of the island's people**

The predominantly agrarian economy of Jeju began to undergo some changes during the Japanese colonial rule. According to a 1947 study, the Jeju residents fell into the following groups: 69.8% farming, 1.0% fishing, 0.2% construction, 0.5% manufacturing, 0.7% commerce, 0.3% transportation, 1.6% public service and 12.1% others (1.5% students), 3.8% unemployed and 10% profession unknown. Of the farmers, 68.11% owned their farm and 8.54% worked for a landlord.

The Jeju people suffered a cholera epidemic in summer of 1946 and a poor harvest in the fall of the same year. These misfortunes made the life even harder for the impoverished people of Jeju. The US imposed ban on trade with Japan made the situation even worse.

During the Japanese rule, a number of factories sprang up to make goods from the island's raw materials for the Japanese consumers. Many Jeju islanders went to Japan and worked at factories. They remitted monies to their families on Jeju. After the August 15 liberation, 1945, these workers returned home. Other returnees to Jeju included those who served in the Japanese Imperial Army; those who worked in Japanese labor camps and those who served with Mao's 8th Route Army, China. The returnees swelled the Jeju population by 35%.

The returnees became idle intellectuals or entrepreneurs. They joined the ranks of progressive activists working to bring

about social justice and equal economic opportunities. They joined a Committee for the Preparation for Korean Independence(CPKI), The Jeju People's Committee, the Communist Youth Association, The Jeju Committee, and other socio-political organizations.

The Jeju People's Committee, formed on September 23, 1945, became de facto governing body of the island. The Jeju Chosun(Korea) Communist Party was formed on December 9, 1945. The party membership of 500 included prominent activists representing youth, women, artistes, writers, educators, workers, religionists and farmers. They opposed the colonial policies of the United States and supported the 3-party Moscow agreement.

The right wingers tried to contain the leftists who pushed for democracy, wanted to bring down pro-Japanese traitors. Their primary organ was the Han-ra Party formed in September 1945. It worked to chip away the political power of the entrenched leftists. For example, it spread false rumors about unlawful acts of the People's Security Forces controlled by the Gunkookjunbiwiwonhoe(korean), Nation Foundation Preparation Committee and engaged in anti-Communist propaganda.

In 1946, the US Military Government sent Cho Byong Ok to Jeju to lead the Jeju anti-Communist right-wingers. The Northwest Youth League made of refugees from North Korea where Sungman Rhee's home town, supported Cho. The League was a white terror organization and extorted funds from businesses and wealthy families around the all country.

A 500-men police contingent from Seoul and 1,700 men from the provincial police units augmented the Jeju police on April 24, 1948. Choe Chi Whan commanded the police until May 29, 1948. The Jeju police reported killing 320 rebels in April, 1948 alone. This amounted to more than 90% of the reported strength(350) of the rebels or it may be that the police well-

reported the rebel strength.

In the conclusion of the Report, American responsibility comments very briefly as follows :

As we are might be aware, the final report of truth-finding efforts in three year from the 2000 year in Korea, national committee proposed seven recommendations to the Government :

1. To issues an apology to Jeju islanders, the victims and their families
2. To declare the date of April 3 as a memorial day
3. To utilize the final report as educational material
4. To actively support the establishment of Jeju April 3 Peace Park
5. To provide essential living expenses to bereaved families suffering from poverty
6. To support excavations of mass graves and historical sites
7. To continuously support further investigations and memorial affairs.

Following the final draft of the report is passed, President Roh Moo Hyun issues a concise apology to the victims and their families. But they did not satisfied because of no reparation and nor the claim of American responsibility in the further process by dint of incomplete report without American participation in the investigation process.

#### Epilogue

The Petition in the processing what calling for a "Joint South Korea and United States Jeju 4.3 events/Tragedy Task Force to Further Implement Recommendations and Foster Comprehensive and Enduring *Social Healing Through Justice*" seeks to advance the mutual interests of Jeju residents and the governments and people of South Korea and the United States is very crucial issue to fulfil transition justice in the Korean democratization in due course. To do so, I remind additional truth finding is also indispensable task to overcome the very conservative right wing's standing in

the street.

For recognition, I draw upon attention the conditions of victims, devastated sentiment, trauma, poverty and island's community degradation.

For responsibility, the role, deed and trait of American soldier, position of US Government at that time must be acknowledged after investigation immediately. In this issue to resolve, I believe in American rationality, the pragmatism, liberalism and democratic legitimacy and a dynamic international human right regime. In doing without it, every thing face up with difficult situation. In this regard, the Jeju people deserve an apology and reparation from the US Government for its ultimate responsibility for the punishment that Jeju suffered.

For reconstruction, militarisation of Jeju Island abandoning 'World Peace Island priority', such as new naval base construction on Kangjeong seashore, Sogwipo, Jeju-do must be reconsider or stop, at first and promptly prior to reconstruction.

For reparation, clarification between restitution, compensation and rehabilitation should be necessary because of some of the Korean would be confused the meaning and scope without conception, the reparative justice till now from the very bad time suffered. I once again remind the Truth will be key player in this social healing through justice.

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