



Update

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Vernon & Martha Hedge

Prepared for God's Opportunity

Calvary Commission has many facets—prison ministry, after-care, Bible Institute, missions, orphanages, and local outreaches. All are designed to reach the unreached and fulfill the Great Commission. We never know how God will use a life completely surrendered to Him. It's our job to surrender. I keep that in mind as I have the privilege to equip men and women in the Word.

With that in mind and the international focus on North Korea, I would like to share a powerful story. Dr. Coy Quesenbury spoke at the Calvary Commission chapel recently and related this missionary story of American-born Harold Voelkel who lived from 1898-1984. After Dr. Quesenbury resigned as pastor of his church, he was drafted for military service and served in Korea in 1959-1960 as a chaplain's assistant. There he met Dr. Voelkel, traveled with him some, and visited in his home.

As a young man Dr. Voelkel felt the call to missionary ministry. He enrolled in Moody Bible Institute to prepare for ministry. There he met a young woman who had been born and reared in Korea by her American missionary parents. They fell in love and married. He said with a sly smile that he wanted to go to Latin America, she wanted to go to Korea, so they compromised and went to Korea in 1928.

His wife was an immense help in learning the language and customs of the Korean people. The Japanese

occupied the Korean peninsula from about 1910 to 1945 when Japan surrendered to Allied forces. Much of the Voelkels' ministry took place during the latter part of that occupation. The Japanese strongly opposed the Christian churches in Korea, but they were glad for the missionaries to provide education and children's homes. Dr. Voelkel worked in education, caring for orphans, and did personal evangelistic work among the people.

Meanwhile, as the Japanese Imperial government expanded, they strongly enforced Shintoism. It was no longer safe for the missionaries, so they returned to America. At the end of World War II in 1945 when Japan surrendered, the Allied forces and the Russian government agreed that Korea would be divided at the 38th parallel into North and South Korea. Both were supposed to have free elections to determine what kind of government they would have. But the Russians skipped the election and set up a totalitarian communist country naming it the *Korean People's*

Democratic Republic. South Korea named theirs the *Republic of Korea*, voted to become a democratically ruled country and became a prosperous free nation.

As the Russians were setting up their regime, for a brief time missionaries and Korean Christians in the North rebuilt the church buildings that had been closed by the Japanese. The Voelkels and many other missionaries returned to Korea, and for a short period Christians were thriving in the North. The northern part of Korea was the heart of Christian activity for the country. The capital city of P'Yong Yang was full of churches.

But as the Soviet domination strongly promoted atheism, Christians were restricted. The persecution became so intense thousands fled south. That meant the Voelkels had to leave their home in North Korea where no missionaries were allowed. They became residents of a missionary compound in Seoul, the capital of South Korea.

Without warning, at 4 a.m. on June 25, 1950, there was a massive attack from the North which took everyone totally by surprise. Seoul was taken in a short time and soon the South Korean Army and their American allies were almost pushed off the Korean peninsula, and the Korean Conflict was under way.

When the attack came, the Voelkel family was taking a much-

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needed brief vacation on the south coast. They weren't captured and sent to a North Korean prison camp. Like all American civilians they evacuated to Japan which had been under the restoration plan of General McArthur. All the Voelkels had were their suitcases for the brief vacation.

Concentrating their forces, the United States, UN forces, and the South Korean army forced the North Korean communists back almost all the way to the Chinese border, but the Chinese sent masses of troops into the fray, forcing retreat all the way south of Seoul again. The Communists eventually were forced back near where the war had begun.

Dr. Voelkel was in Japan praying for some way to get back to Korea when he received a message from the head Chaplain of the Far Eastern Command in Tokyo. He was invited to become a chaplain among the Korean troops being trained to join with the Americans in the Conflict. Dr. Voelkel was offered the job with the civilian equivalent rank of Colonel. He was overjoyed, and the position would give him freedom to function on spiritual matters without having any military responsibility.

He soon began visiting the prisoners of war from North Korea. He discovered a few of them were Christians who had been pressed into service in the North Korean army. When Dr. Voelkel was visiting one of the large camps he asked an American guard if there were any Christians there. The guard replied that there were and there was a minister as well. The minister was Im Han Sang, a pastor of a church in North Korea, who was greatly persecuted by the Japanese, and then imprisoned in brutal conditions by the Russians.

He was mistaken for a North Korean soldier and sent to a prison camp in the South where he ministered to thousands and won many to the Lord.

Dr. Voelkel preached in the prison camps to thousands where many became Christians. They had no Bibles, hymn books, or loud speakers, so he divided the crowds into groups of three or four hundred. They would learn songs and Scriptures by memory.

When the Conflict ground to a halt and the peace talks began, many of the Christians came to Dr. Voelkel. If they returned to the North, they would be imprisoned or killed because they had become Christians. They gave him a petition using their own blood as ink, asking that all prisoners who wished to do so be allowed to stay in the South and not be repatriated. Dr. Voelkel took this petition to the UN and got it approved. A few South Koreans and 21 Americans chose North Korea. Thousands from the North chose to remain in South Korea.

Dr. Quesenbury, said in 1960 that he visited in Dr. Voelkel's home in Seoul. Dr. Voelkel gave this report: "More than one hundred men who were once soldiers in the North Korean Army were now pastors of churches in South Korea." One of those men was there that day and Dr. Quesenbury was able to shake his hand and take a picture, one he greatly prizes.

Thanks!

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When Dr. Voelkel retired from the mission field he had a document with pictures of 131 men in academic caps and gowns, graduates of theological seminaries, all former POWs. Several became missionaries, including some to Brazil.

Here is a portion of Dr. Voelkel's statement about his service among the prisoners of war. *The ministry to the POW's has been the happiest and I believe the most fruitful ministry of my life ... a work among 150,000 men that by His grace they made their way into churches, Bible conferences, and Bible institutes ... God has guided, protected, and prospered all along the way. He has kept His hand so manifestly and wonderfully on this work that at times I break out into laughter at the marvel of it all. God saving, training, and inspiring men to radiant Christian lives behind barbed wire. It is another of His holy surprises.*

Dr. Voelkel estimated that 15,000 men found Christ during the three years he worked in the POW camps.

Billy Graham after a Crusade in Korea made this statement: *When I was in Korea it was my privilege to observe firsthand the work of Chaplain Harold Voelkel in the prisoner of war camps. The story of this work is one of the most amazing and thrilling stories of modern times. What God has wrought through His servant and co-laborers is a modern-day miracle.*

Dr. Voelkel was a humble man who felt he was just in the right place, at the right time. But he was God's man with the right preparation when opportunity presented itself.

And that is a personal challenge as a teacher—to prepare my students for when God opens opportunity. ✨

[For more information about Dr. Voelkel, visit <https://urbana.org/blog/harold-voelkel>]
