

# The N. Korean Caper

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By Philip A. McCombs  
and Jaehoon Ahn  
Washington Post Staff Writers

GRAND RAPIDS Mich.—“Why they kill each other? Same people! Since I grew up, this is my dream: how I can help North and South Korea people to live together without blood, to help each other!”

Paul Kyunghwan Chang, 37, a short, round-faced Korean-born man dressed in sweaty green jail fatigues, grew excited as he tried to explain the bizarre circumstances surrounding three mysterious journeys he made to North Korea in 1974.

Chang, a naturalized U.S. citizen who in recent years has

lived in the Washington area and worked for the D.C. government, was jailed here after pleading guilty to a charge of impersonating an American CIA official in connection with his secret trips to North Korea. He is now awaiting sentencing for the federal crime.

Who is Paul Chang and how and why did he go to North Korea? Apparently, U.S. officials and officials of North and South Korea would like answers to the same question. So would three prominent Korean-born U.S. residents who were recruited by Chang to accompany him to North

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## CHANG, From A1

Korea on missions he describes as "top secret."

In his jail cell here, Chang portrays himself simply as an idealistic Korean who went to North Korea in hopes of promoting a peaceful reunification of the two Koreas. While in the North, according to this portrayal, he and his companions conducted extensive philosophical, military and economic discussions with North Korean officials.

The speculation about his activities—made more mysterious by his guilty plea—runs in several, sometimes contradictory, directions.

Those around him say he told them he was with the CIA and that his mission was approved by the National Security Council and Henry Kissinger. Some of them now speculate that he was working for the North Koreans. At the same time, he says he was closely associated with former South Korean Ambassador-at-Large You Chan Yang.

The prosecutor in the case said he thinks Chang simply was looking for personal prestige.

Those involved with Chang's court case here tend to think his operations were motivated by idealism or a desire for self-aggrandizement.

Several official and unofficial observers in Washington, however, say they are intrigued. They wonder if his operations weren't too well organized to have been merely the work of an ardent idealist on his own.

They also suggest Chang's trips could have fit the pattern of Nixon administration overtures to mainland China following then-President Nixon's 1972 visit there. But Richard Solomon, a China specialist who was a key National Security Council aide to Kissinger at the time of Chang's trips, said the Nixon administration could not have been behind them.

"It may be that some ambitious Korean made the trips, Solomon said, "but it sounds a little bit out of synch with what I knew of the problem at the time."

Mr. Nixon resigned from the presidency Aug. 9, 1974, just after Chang's second trip to North Korea, and his successor, Gerald Ford, then visited South Korea in November, 1974, without making any apparent change in the U.S. policy of support for the martial law regime of President Park Chung Hee.

Frank S. Spies, the deputy U.S. attorney in charge of Chang's case in Michigan, said he is convinced that Chang was not working for any U.S. federal agency when he made his 1974 trips to North Korea. A CIA official was ready to testify at Chang's trial, which was made unnecessary by his guilty plea, that Chang never worked

for the agency, Spies said.

In addition, lie detector tests administered to Chang indicated that he was not an agent of either North or South Korea, nor was he plotting a coup attempt in South Korea, Spies said.

"I think he wanted to build himself up," said Spies. "He wanted to be an international fixer. He just wanted the prestige."

What is known about Paul Chang and his adventures could be ingredients in a spy thriller: international intrigue, involvement with a former Korean general and an ambassador, mysterious travel documents, a rendezvous in Paris, a brief detention in a Moscow hotel and little wads of U.S. \$100 bills as thick as a man's thumb.

Out of it all can be gleaned more details of the activities in this country of Koreans and Korean-born Americans who try to influence U.S. policy toward the Koreans. Some of the more questionable of these activities—involving women, money and congressmen—have recently become subjects of government investigations and hearings in Washington. Chang's case is less raw and more mysterious than these.

Extensive checking in Washington's Korean community showed that many people who knew Paul Chang thought he worked for the CIA or was some other sort of U.S. intelligence agent. However, no one seemed to know any details about his employment or where he got money to live, although he was regarded as affluent. His acquaintances knew him as an amiable man who happened to be a good golfer.

"We all assumed he works for the U.S. government," said Ki-whang Kim, former president of the Korean Golfers Association of Washington. "But I don't know his job. His living standard was high. He visited Korea very, very often. He didn't seem to me like a Communist. Maybe he just wanted to be famous."

A U.S. CIA man, non-Korean, said: "Yeah, I remember that guy. He would approach certain people on the golf course, sort of name-drop, say 'I've been to North Korea recently.' It was a weird sort of thing. He would sort of hint he worked for the agency."

The CIA man said he checked Chang out and learned that Chang did not work for the agency. "After that I just assumed he worked for one of the military intelligence agencies," the CIA man said. "There are so many of them around."

"Chang was said to have many friends in the Korean Embassy in Washington, including Korean CIA operatives there, and many high-ranking friends in South Korea.

In preliminary hearings in court here, Chang and his attorney testified that Chang was a citizen of South Ko-

rea when he first came to the U.S. in 1962. He studied at Georgetown University and was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1964, according to the testimony.

Chang became an American citizen in 1967 and continued to serve in the U.S. Army until his honorable discharge in 1971. He served in both South Korea and South Vietnam, often as a liaison officer or in the intelligence field his attorney testified.

After that, Chang testified, he worked for the D.C. government—first as a juvenile home guard and

later as a computer specialist. He testified that he left D.C. government work in 1973, and recently tried to start an export-import business in California. His wife is suing him for divorce, according to the testimony.

In an interview in his jail cell, Chang showed scars on his forearm and said he had been tortured as a youth by the North Korean Communists during the Korean conflict. He said he regards the Communists as the enemy but thinks it important to talk with them.

Chang said he worked closely in arranging the trips with the late former South Korean Ambassador-at-Large You Chan Yang, who urged him to go on the trips, encourage him to recruit others to accompany him, and received Chang's reports on the results of the trips.

Chang indicated strongly in the interview that he considered his connection with Yang personal rather than official. "Ambassador Yang and myself, it was our own judgement," Chang said, when asked who originated the idea for the trips. "We wanted to know what did the North Koreans think. Do they really want peaceful reunification, or to come down south (militarily)..."

Chang emphatically denied that he was working for the U.S. CIA or South Korean CIA. "I was working before as a U.S. intelligence agent," Chang said, referring to his Army work. "My friends still believe I'm an agent, even I say I got out a long time ago. They say, 'Hey, go on, man, don't lie to me.'"

When Chang first met former Ambassador Yang on the Washington social circuit in late 1973, the ambassador was in his mid-70s and had been living in Washington for a quarter-century.

Though a U.S. citizen, Yang had been Syngman Rhee's ambassador from 1951 until Rhee stepped down in 1960. Like Rhee, Yang was regarded by some hardliners both in Washington and South Korea as somewhat soft on Communism. In the Korean context, that could mean his anti-Communism was only slightly less strong

than Park Chung Hee's.

Nevertheless, Yang gradually gained partial acceptance with Park's regime. By the time Chang met him, Yang had solid contacts as well as social entree with officials in the Nixon White House, according to observers in Washington.

However, Yang was then an old man holding little more than an honorific title and was "essentially out of it" when it came to substantive matters, as one observer put it. Yang later died of cancer.

Before Yang's death, Chang said, he and the aging ambassador held long discussions about setting up a nonprofit organization to help Koreans in the Washington area. "Why not?" said Chang excitedly. "Why cannot we help our own people? We talk about that."

They also talked of setting up a Korean church so that all Washington-area Koreans could worship together. And they talked about reunification of the two Koreas.

In March, 1974, North Korean Foreign Minister Ho Dam proposed direct Pyongyang-Washington talks to produce a peace agreement replacing the 1953 armistice. The move was seen as an effort to go over the South Koreans' heads and perhaps win propaganda points, and the U.S. State De-

partment advised instead that the North Koreans should talk earnestly to their southern brothers.

Talks between North and South Korea, which surprised the world when they had begun in 1972, had dribbled to a halt before early 1974, when North Korea made this approach to Washington. Chang said it was in response to this approach that he made his first trip to North Korea.

He said that he and Yang studied the North Korean proposal and that in late March and early April, 1974, Chang went alone to North Korea. He did not explain how he arranged that trip. He refused to answer some questions on the advice of his attorney, who sat in on Chang's interview with The Washington Post.

When he arrived in North Korea on this first trip, Chang said, "I told them, 'I'm not spying. I'm not working for the South or the American government. If you kill me or jail me I can't get out. Now, what do you people want?'"

"I said, 'I came to see you people. I want to look around.' They show me elementary school and other things. They had a big subway, with trains, buried 70 meters underground! 70 meters! Nothing like that in America.

"Then we discuss and discuss. Eight or 10 of them. Ten days like that. They talk no bloodshed, no fighting. They would like to talk with the U.S. people. They were anxious and willing to talk with the American government."

When Chang returned to Washington, he said he reported everything to Yang. "I told him they're anxious to talk with the American people, and I think they really want reunification—but military or peaceful? I don't know."

Chang said that Yang finally told him "he cannot depend only on my opinion."

Because of this, a second trip was decided upon with three other persons recruited to go along: Choe Won Chul, an Arlington, Va., real estate man; Andrew Nahm, a naturalized American citizen who is a professor of history at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, south of here; and former Gen. Chang Do-Young (no relation to Paul Chang), a South Korean citizen who teaches in Western Michigan's college of general studies.

Some Washington observers regard it as amazing that Gen. Chang and Nahm became involved and as even more amazing that they seemed to believe they were performing a sensitive mission for high U.S. officials.

Gen. Chang, the former South Korean chief of staff who helped put Park in power in the 1961 Korean coup but who was subsequently exiled, said he isn't talking until he finds out who Paul Chang is. "I thought we were doing a good thing for both the U.S. and South Korean governments," Gen. Chang said,



**PAUL K. CHANG**

... "top secret" missions

throwing up his hands, "but now I don't know."

It was Nahm who finally blew the whistle on Paul Chang. Growing suspicious and angry after his return from North Korea, Nahm said in an interview that he wrote a letter to then-CIA chief William Colby, asking what was going on.

Colby replied that Paul Chang didn't work for the agency and that the FBI ought to be notified, Nahm said. The FBI arrested Paul Chang in Los Angeles on April 28, 1976.

Nahm, a dapper, soft-spoken man, said he first met Paul Chang in early May, 1974, at a conference of the Research Institute on Korean Affairs in Silver Spring, where they talked casually about Korean reunification.

Later, Paul Chang telephoned Nahm in Kalamazoo to continue the conversations, saying there was an urgent need for the U.S. government to decide whether to adopt a new Korea policy in the wake of the 1974 North Korean initiative, according to Nahm.

Nahm said he found Chang's arguments "plausible... He convinced me that the U.S. government needs

men like us to make this trip to collect data and make recommendations... I thought this is a way to help the U.S. government and help the Korean situation. I immediately volunteered."

Nahm said he introduced Paul Chang to Gen. Chang in Kalamazoo. He said he and Gen. Chang had wanted "some sort of written statement from the U.S. government, but Paul Chang said this is a top secret mission. They only people who knew about it were the National Security Council. Kissinger knew. This is its project. State didn't know. Top CIA officials, they knew. He (Paul Chang) said his CIA bureau chief knew, and his rise and fall in the agency depended on its success. He just sealed our mouths like that."

Apparently Paul Chang made no mention to the others of Ambassador Yang.

When asked during his interview with The Post in the missions were for Kissinger, Paul Chang answered "no comment" after consulting his court-appointed attorney, R. Craig Avery.

Paul Chang said Nahm and Gen. Chang were chosen because of their expertise in political and military affairs, and because both were born in North Korea and could therefore gauge changes there. Paul Chang himself was born in the South and is not familiar with the North, he said.

The four began their journey on June 30, 1974, flying to Paris, Nahm said. There they split into two groups, Nahm travelling with Choe.

All four travelled from Paris onward using North Korean documents, Nahm said. He never had personal possession of his document, which was always in the possession of either Paul Chang or of North Korea officials who met them in Prague, Moscow, Peking, and finally Pyongyang, he said.

He said he didn't know how Paul Chang had made the arrangements with the North Koreans. "I was, of course, scared. We saw enough 'Mission Impossible' programs to think that the U.S. government would disavow us (in case of trouble). But I was so thoroughly convinced that there was a prearranged agreement between the U.S. and North Korea..."

The four arrived in North Korea July 16 and returned to the United States via the same route Aug. 2. They spend nearly two weeks in North Korea.

Nahm said that on his arrival at the airport, "The North Koreans came to us (Nahm and Gen. Chang) and wanted to know what Paul Chang's position was with the CIA. I said, 'All I know is he's working for CIA.' They also wanted to know what influence we had on U.S. policy. They thought we worked for the U.S. government!"

Nahm said that in Pyongyang there were polite, though sometimes tense, discussions with North Korean officials on economics, military matters and philosophy. He said the North Koreans tentatively offered to subsidize some seminars at Western Michigan, but nothing came of it.

"The only blunder they made was to try to give us cash at the end—brand new \$100 U.S. green," said Nahm. The North Koreans invoked the old Korean custom of giving a gift to visitors when they leave, he said, but he and the others turned the money down.

Nahm said he thought there was perhaps \$10,000 in bills offered him, and he held up his forefinger and thumb about 1/2-inch apart to indicate the thickness of the wad. Choe said he received an envelope with about \$5,000 in it that he returned.

Nahm said that when he and Gen. Chang returned to Kalamazoo, they spent much time talking and preparing to write their report to the U.S. government. Chang had told them such a report would be expected, Nahm said.

But when they didn't hear from Paul Chang and couldn't reach him by phone for several months, Nahm said he wrote Colby. Nahm said he was also concerned because he hadn't received reimbursement for his trip expenses, as Paul Chang had promised he would.

"If he didn't work for the North Korean government, I don't think the trip was possible, and I don't think he was working for the South Korean government," said Nahm. Then he laughed. "But... ah... I don't know, really. How can you be 100 per cent sure who he's working for at this moment?"

Choe, the Arlington real estate man, also said he thinks Paul Chang

was working for the North Koreans. "All the time I thought he was a secret agent of the U.S. government," Choe said. "In conclusion, I'm a victim. I only wanted a free trip. I gave everything, my diary, to the FBI. I don't want you to write about me. I'm tired."

Paul Chang said that when he returned to Washington he reported to Ambassador Yang. It was not clear why he did not ask Nahm, Gen. Chang and Choe to report to Yang also. Nor did Chang say what use, if any, Yang made of the information.

"I told him it was a successful trip," said Chang. After that, he said, both he and Yang went to South Korea in connection with fund-raising for their proposed nonprofit Korean self-help organization.

Chang said that while he was there he talked with acquaintances about his trips to North Korea and thus thinks that he informally informed the South Korean government about them.

He said that Yang met with President Park at this time, "but I don't know if he told (Park) about the trips." Yang then became sick and returned to Washington, where he died in late October.

Chang made his third and final trip to North Korea at about the same time, although it is not clear whether this was before or after Yang returned to Washington. Chang took Choe along as a personal secretary, he said, so he wouldn't have to take notes himself and could be free to talk.

Chang said he made the third trip in order to ask the North Koreans if they were behind the Aug. 15 assassination attempt on Park in Seoul that resulted in the death of Park's wife. He also wanted to ask them why they had captured some South Korean fishermen, he said.

"This no good!" exclaimed Chang. "If they do these things, then they will try to capture the south by military force. They got to stop it!"

This time their reception was chilly and they were glad to get out of North Korea alive, Chang said. On their way home, they were detained for several days in a hotel in Moscow, which caused them some concern until they were finally allowed to travel on.