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[Crazy World](#)
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[Movies](#)
[Music](#)
[History Cafe](#)
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[Poetry](#)
[Politics](#)

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Summer Camp in Korea: The Ultimate Punishment?

By [Geoff Dean](#)

As the bus pulls into the campgrounds, the "cadets'" eyes widen. For many of them, this is the first clue that they are going to summer camp. Duped by parents with a promise of a holiday at the beach, they instead arrive at Blue Dragon Marine Corps Training Camp on Daebu Island about 80 kilometers and a million light years away from Seoul.

The cadets, ages 7 to 19, live in military-style barracks, eat "delicious" military-style, extremely frugal rations, and are



run through a battery of tests and drills by retired drill sergeants from pre-dawn until late at night.

The goal of these [boot camps](#) is to "break" the physically and mentally fragile youth of South Korea, according to camp leader, Park Kyung Hoon, a former drill sergeant himself. He sees South Korean youth as addicted to video games, TV, and the [Internet](#) and unable to perform simple physical tasks. He, also, views them as chronic "complainers" who know nothing of hard work to achieve a goal. They, in his view, treat parents and teachers with disrespect, lack discipline, and are violent to their peers.

Similarly, Park views the parents of the youth of today as weak-willed and unable to impose order. His generation (that of the Korean War era) know the meaning of suffering and hardship and must, in his view, pass a little on to the young people of today.

If you think of summer camp, as crafts, swimming in the pond, riding horses, and being attacked by flies, you are in the wrong country. Korean Summer Camp means marching in the rain, through a muddy field, in formation. Dropping behind means push-ups in the muck. Running with tires dragging behind. Extra time on the barbed-wire obstacle course. Carrying boats over their heads for extended periods. It didn't mention peeling potatoes and KP or cleaning the latrines but that couldn't be far behind.

How do kids feel about Summer Camp as torture and parents who dupe them into going there? Surprisingly enough, most of them seemed

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to be pretty darn angry. Later, they will appreciate the experience claimed some parents who, I doubt, would be willing to go there themselves.

Let's grant for a minute that Korean kids are undisciplined, lazy, weak, both mentally and physically, rude to parents and others, and addicted to video games and the like. I don't claim to know this but let's accept it just for the sake of argument. And, in a similar spirit, let's assume that summer camps like this work, which I do not know that they do. The problem still remains that these kids will go back to the families and parents that "spoiled" them in the first place. Two-weeks in Camp Hell is not going to overcome a year-long free ride in a "do as you please" family. The problem, in my view, is the parents. Send them all to camp. Until they shape up or are shipped out. If all the camps in South Korea are already filled to capacity, maybe North Korea would oblige.....

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