

# THE KOREAN CONNECTION: OR, DEALING WITH THE

## " STUDENT DIRECTED STUDY"

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In the spring of 1973 four of us worked together on a single historical enquiry -- Who began the Korean War? Most Americans have assumed that the North Koreans attacked the South without warning, but a few historians have suggested that the South Korean government secretly initiated the fighting. We tried to discover which of these two ideas was correct.

The idea for the project came slowly. For some time now I have been doing research on events around the year 1950 and have been puzzled by a few unanswered questions; the enigma of the Korean War was one of them. I had already begun searching for a solution to the riddle at about the time several students came to me to ask about the new "student directed study" program the school was offering. I knew all three quite well, for not only had they been my advisees for several years but we had gone out for coffee together many times and had become good friends. I told them that this new independent research program allowed them to take up to six (or more) credits, concentrating on one topic they couldn't get in class, and that it did not necessarily involve writing a paper. I suggested that we all work together on the subject I had already begun. They might learn something about research methods, and I would obviously benefit by their efforts.

We began on January 2nd, three weeks before the semester started, by putting together a complete bibliography -- the only one on this topic in existence. For the next several months we separately studied certain key subsidiary points, although we got together at least once a week to talk about our progress. One student examined a particular military action that occurred in the first few hours of the war. Another read through the diplomatic records of the week or so just before the shooting began. The third checked into rumors that a particular group of Chinese had prior knowledge of the event and had profited from it. I tried to coordinate all our efforts and lay the groundwork for each succeeding step we would follow. We worked at Yale and the University of Connecticut; we checked into manuscripts at West Point; and during spring vacation we drove to Washington to study at the Library of Congress, the Archives, and the Department of Commerce. On the way back we stopped for two days at the army research center in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

At the end we didn't have any definitive answer, and today I'm still struggling with the question. But I think we all learned something, and I know we all enjoyed it.

The three students have now graduated. One went on to McGill University in Montreal where he is now trying to learn Canadian and British history. Another is studying forestry in the graduate school at Syracuse. The third is out of academic life entirely. None of them is specifically using the knowledge he gained by researching the Korean War, but they all insist that the project was very valuable and worthwhile from a personal point of view. It was for me.