

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE STATEMENT

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Ph.D. Applicant

I can enhance your community's diversity and inclusion with my military experiences. From July 2013 to April 2015, I successfully fulfilled my duty as a non-commissioned officer (NCO) in the United States Forces Korea, advancing the United States–Korea joint force's diversity and uniformity as a comrade. I did face challenging circumstances upon taking my responsibility as a part of the leadership, including overcoming the sense of incompatibility. Two different branches—the United States and Korean armies—shared a common mission to defend freedom in East Asia. However, there was a considerable asymmetry in social status between them. The American soldiers were the military professionals as their job while Korean soldiers were mostly college students fulfilling their mandatory military service in the army. There was also a significant gap between their salaries where Korean soldiers only received a minimal monthly wage (~\$150 a month¹), about a tenth of the American soldiers' basic pay, for their mandatory service. Such social and economic discrepancies acted as a source of segregation between the two branches. For instance, Korean soldiers were often demotivated to perform their job, indifferent to their honor to serve the nation, and avoided daily duties. They also found it hard to socialize with the American soldiers because spending a few dollars to talk over a drink was a burden, unless they received financial support from family. As a result, Korean soldiers fell behind and failed to grow as sergeants (i.e., non-commissioned officers), who must demonstrate proper leadership and sound decision-making.

To overcome the problem and cultivate genuine uniformity between the American and Korean soldiers, I lead them by example. I believed my self-esteem, resilience, and fluency in English would enhance Korean soldiers' value and contribute to the United States–Korea joint force's strength. I promoted a closer understanding among the soldiers by volunteering to take the American soldiers to the Korean baseball league, which was a big hit because it allowed for socialization between the American and Korean soldiers. The American soldiers were excited about the Korean baseball league's fan chants, and they favorably treated Korean soldiers asking to take them to baseball games. My commander recognized my efforts and recommended me to the Warrior Leader Course at the Wightman NCO Academy. While soldiers are usually allowed to enter an NCO academy after spending about three years in the Army, I made it in after only 16 months. I successfully graduated from the course [1], and I was assigned duty as the Senior KATUSA² to represent about 50 Korean enlisted soldiers in the company. I was a proud and respected member of the company's leadership and fulfilled my duty with honor until my separation. I influenced my Korean subordinates to be motivated and self-esteemed soldiers. Many of these soldiers graduated from the NCO Academy and accomplished their mission to reinforce the joint force's combat power as one team. During my military life, I went from being a member of a minority group to that of a respected and distinguished leader. I learned that leading by example is key to encouraging diversity and inclusion, and this is something I intend to continue practicing while pursuing my Ph.D. at the University of Pennsylvania.



Figure 1: My official photo as the Senior KATUSA, 2014.

¹Data as of 2015. The latest monthly wage for conscripted soldiers is ~\$500 as of 2021. [Source]

²Korean Augmentation to the United States Army. [Source]

References

- [1] The Wightman NCO Academy. Diploma of Graduation, Dec. 2014. https://shpark.org/files/WLC_Diploma.pdf.