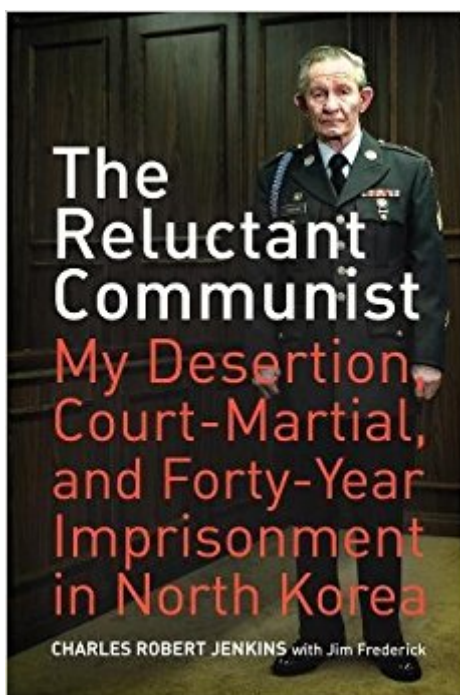


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The Reluctant Communist: My Desertion, Court-Martial, And Forty-Year Imprisonment In North Korea



Synopsis

In January of 1965, twenty-four-year-old U.S. Army sergeant Charles Robert Jenkins abandoned his post in South Korea, walked across the DMZ, and surrendered to communist North Korean soldiers standing sentry along the world's most heavily militarized border. He believed his action would get him back to the States and a short jail sentence. Instead he found himself in another sort of prison, where for forty years he suffered under one of the most brutal and repressive regimes the world has known. This fast-paced, harrowing tale, told plainly and simply by Jenkins (with journalist Jim Frederick), takes the reader behind the North Korean curtain and reveals the inner workings of its isolated society while offering a powerful testament to the human spirit.

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Customer Reviews

In January, 1965, Jenkins was a U.S. Army sergeant stationed in South Korea. Sure that he was about to be sent to Vietnam, he drank ten beers, abandoned his patrol, and crossed into North Korea. He spent the next four decades in a country that had become "a giant, demented prison," until the Japanese government secured his release, along with that of his Japanese wife, who had been abducted by the North Koreans. Jenkins's book is oddly compelling. The blank ordinariness of his character brings out the moral and physical ugliness of life in North Korea, where soldiers steal and beg for food; a dog digs up a fresh mass grave (and the next day all the dogs in the neighborhood are shot); and Jenkins awakens to the bleak, deadening realization that his two daughters are being groomed as spies. "I would always tell them, 'we are not in the real world. This is not the real world,'" Jenkins writes of his daughters. "But they didn't

believe me." Copyright ©2008 Click here to subscribe to The New Yorker --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

“One of the most important and devastating accounts of life inside a totalitarian society.” (Commentary 2008-05-01)

The "Reluctant Communist" was extremely interesting and enjoyable to read because of some of the personal knowledge this reader had with one of the defectors. Larry Allen Abshier was one of four US Army defectors who lived together with the author Charles Robert Jenkins in North Korea. Abshier left his US Army post in the spring of 1962, never to return to the United States. He died of an apparent heart attack in North Korea in 1983. Abshier and I were in the same company of the 1st Cavalry Division although in different platoons. We were sent into the demilitarized zone between North and South Korea as infantry soldiers to perform duty on outposts, foot patrols and stakeouts. Our job was to report any North Korean activity or any incursion by the North Korean army into the South. My understanding was that Abshier had gotten into an argument with the mess sergeant and was reprimanded by the 1st sergeant and may have received some type of nonjudicial punishment for his insubordination. This apparently worked on his weak emotional mind and while at an outpost, left his rifle and headed into North Korea to what he may have perceived as being a better alternative to the rigors of the treatment he received from the US Army. A few days later, we soldiers were listening to the communist propaganda on the radio from Pyongyang the capital city of North Korea. Abshier reportedly told his captors that the US Army in South Korea was preparing to wage war with the North and were bringing equipment and weapons to the border in readiness to make an invasion into the North. The army was also running their military vehicles through the towns and villages and raping and plundering as they went. Wow! What a completely unbelievable piece of propaganda that was! The broadcast went on to state that Abshier was now in a better environment and would be receiving an education and training into the Communist North Korean culture. Reminds me of the brainwashing from the movie "The Manchurian Candidate". That was the last I heard from Larry Abshier until the publishing of this book. It was enlightening for me personally to now know the culmination of what took place and the continuity of the time from the defection to his death.

Fantastic inside look at North Korea. The classic military, "don't be this guy" story, all the guys who deserted to North Korea has screws loose. However, for guys who didn't seem to have much

backbone or character while serving in the army, they showed incredible strength and resilience surviving in North Korea.

Started reading and nearly abandoned the book. Kept going and I'm glad that I did. At first he appears such a duffer, dill, even stupid but after throwing away his flares he was in it up to his neck. What we expected happened next, almost, but they didn't shoot him so I kept reading. The story is told in somewhat of a childish way which I found annoying until I was hooked. Continued reading non-stop right to the end and raced in to tell my Japanese wife that I'd just been brought up to date on Yokata Megumi san and the woman Charley married Soga Hitomi san. Result... Highly recommended.

I thought it started off a little bit slow but the more I got into it I just couldn't put it down. Fascinating true story of a confused young American soldier who came to regret the decision to defect to North Korea where he was held 40 years. This was a real eye opener and makes me very thankful I was born and live in America!

The Reluctant Communist is the harrowing tale of Charles Robert Jenkins' life in North Korea following his desertion from the US Army in 1965. The story is bookended with an exposition of his life before desertion and his ultimate escape in 2003 and new life in Japan. On the book's cover, we see Jenkins staring out from the cover of the Reluctant Communist with a near-expressionless face that belies the gripping tale he tells inside. It's part biography, part confession, part travelogue, part political history, part prodigal son, and ALL thriller. The work brings to vivid life the struggle of the individual against a profoundly evil socialist state. Jenkins teamed with Jim Frederick of Time to write the book. The co-author manages to keep himself in the background for most of the story, limiting himself to the Foreword and to organizing Jenkins' tale into a coherent whole. To his credit, Frederick's discipline helps to retain the plain talk of Jenkins and lend the story an authentic voice, while still moving the story forward at a nice clip. Frederick, hailing from Time Magazine, stumbles once when he inserts gratuitous references to America's racist past in the passages leading up to the desertion. But, thankfully, this PC irrelevancy isn't enough to veer the story over the cliff, and is redeemed by everything that follows. The book could have benefited from a few maps, photos, and/or sketches to personalize the story. Without doubt, there is still an untold but related story of Japanese abductees. One hopes Frederick will tackle that next, since he glosses over this here. But, these are quibbles in an otherwise gripping yarn. Do not miss this book!

I am not usually a non-fiction person, but I really connected with this story and appreciated a look into a culture that we understand so little about. Well-written.

Great book. I started reading this after my tour in Korea which sparked m interst in learning more about the Korean war and its affects on the world. This is a very interesting piece of unknown history. Hard to believe that someones life can get turned upside down for forty plus years. He was essentially imprisoned in north Korea as a result of one decision.

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