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# HAVEN HISTORY

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A CONCISE HISTORY AND PURPOSE OF THE HAVEN BAPTIST CHURCH SERVING KUNSAN AB  
AND GUNSAN CITY SINCE 1971

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## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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Kunsan Air Base is a United States Air Force base located on the west coast of the South Korean peninsula bordered by the Yellow Sea. It is located near the city of Gunsan about 150 miles (240 km) south of Seoul. The town (군산시 in Korean) can be Romanized as both *Gunsan* and *Kunsan*. The United States Air Force uses *Gunsan* to refer to the town, and *Kunsan* to refer to the base.

Today, Kunsan Air Base is the home of the 8th Fighter Wing, "The Wolfpack," assigned to the Pacific Air Forces Seventh Air Force and the 38th Fighter Group of the Republic of Korea Air Force.

The history of Kunsan Air Base dates back to 1938, when Japanese forces occupying Korea built a base near Kunsan for fighter-interceptor aircraft. They called it the "Kunsan Aerodrome". But at the end of World War II, it became the home of the US Military Assistance Advisory Group.

In 1949, US Forces left Korea and the base was turned over to the Republic of Korea Air Force. In 1950, the North Koreans rapidly advanced and took the base on 13 July, 1950. But after the North Koreans captured the base, the US military returned and again established control over the base.

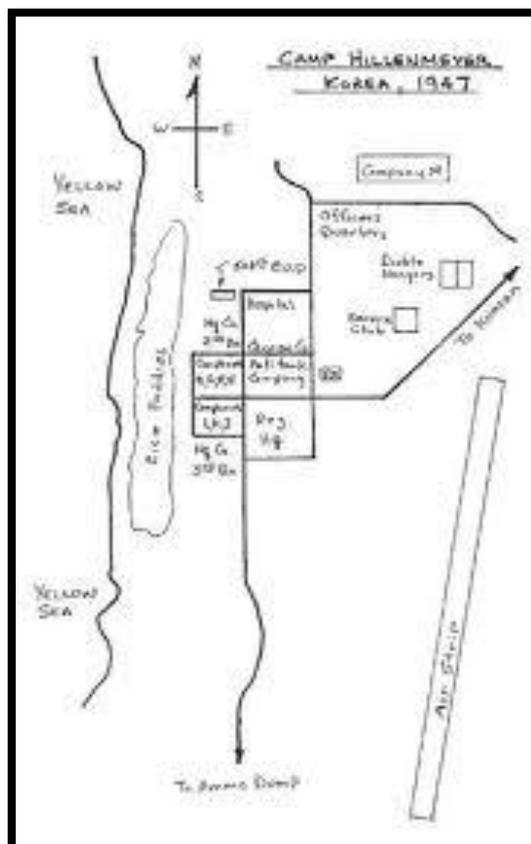
The Japanese "Kunsan Aerodrome" was originally named "Camp Iri" by the United States Army. It was re-designated as "Camp Kunsan" in 1947. The site was also known as "Camp Hillenmeyer" starting in 1947.

Camp Hillenmeyer is named for an American Army Captain killed in an explosion at the Kunsan ammo dump. On November 30, 1945 two American officers, 3 enlisted men and 12 civilians were killed in an explosion while attempting to defuse abandoned Japanese munitions. After the explosion, one officer and the three enlisted men were missing. Two villages were destroyed and 3,000 people left homeless. (Ref: G-2 Periodic Report of the XXIV Corps USAFIK, Report # 82 dated 1 DEC 1945.) The current Ammo Dump is in the same general location of this explosion.

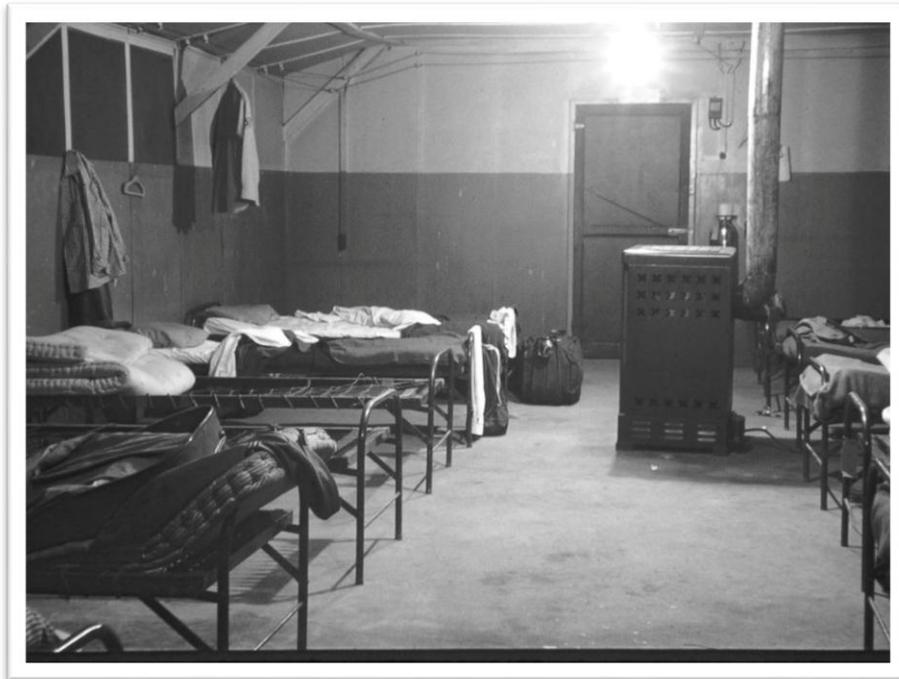
The United States first used the base in 1945, but on a very small scale. From 1945 to 1950, the Army and later the Air Force intermittently operated small detachments from Kunsan, with these detachments maintaining liaison aircraft. At most, these detachments contained a handful of people. When the United States pulled its combat units out of the Republic of Korea in 1949, it left only a Military Assistance Advisory Group in the country, and the periodic detachments at Kunsan became even more infrequent. Believe it or not, in the 1940s, Kunsan was an accompanied tour.



But of course the war changed all of that! In the 1950's Kunsan was a very different place from what it is today. It was the time of the Korean War and shortly thereafter. As you can imagine, the base itself was very different than how it looks today. Here is a hand drawn copy of what "Camp Hillenmeyer" looked like in "the old days":



Here is another picture of the barracks in those early years:



Here is a picture of the front gate. Things were VERY different in those early years. In fact, you wouldn't recognize it!



## [THE HAVEN – A HOME AWAY FROM HOME SINCE 1971]

This is a picture taken in 1951. These buildings were actually family living units! The wood for the structures was actually taken from pre-existing Japanese buildings.



Of course today, things at Kunsan AB are much more modern. The dorms are much nicer; there are phones, fast-food restaurants, and even the internet!



## IN THE BEGINNING. . .

In 1951, a young man named Bob Pierce was stationed at Kunsan AB. This was a very difficult time. It was also a very dark time. Bob saw the spiritual needs of the GIs in Kunsan and it burdened his heart for military missions. Bob never got Kunsan out of his mind or off his heart. After 20 years of ministering and serving in other places, the Lord sent Bob and Marge back to Kunsan.



Sponsored by the Independent Gospel Missions in New Castle, Pennsylvania, Bob and his lovely wife, Marge, returned to Kunsan on 12 May, 1971. In 1972, they started a serviceman's center where military personnel could get away from things and enjoy a Christian environment. They offered a "home-away-from-home" atmosphere where they conducted Bible studies, gospel services, and even served meals.

The first "Haven" was a simple two-room room accommodation on the second floor of a Korean pastor's home in Young Hwa Dong. The Pierces put up posters on the base to invite GIs to this new ministry and on Thursday, 21

May, 1971, four servicemen came to visit and the ministry began. On 22 May, 1971, 12 GIs showed up for the first Saturday Night GI Gospel Hour service.

A Korean Baptist Church allowed the Pierces to use their facilities until a larger place could be located.

Many other ministries began right away – tract ministries in Gunsan City, A-Town, and a special Sunday School Class for Korean children. In a short time, this developed into what is now called the Palsang Orphanage.

Also, a Bi-Lingual church was started called "The Gospel Baptist Church" on 28 April, 1974. This work was turned over to the Koreans after the American Serviceman's Baptist Church was begun. It is quite interesting! The Haven began as a bi-lingual ministry and after many years, it has returned to being one again!

On July the 6<sup>th</sup>, 1972 the first baptism was held at the Gunsan Reservoir with 6 Korean and 5



Americans joining the church. After that time, baptisms were held in Korean bath houses after closing hours. But in 2003, the church was blessed with its own baptistry which is still in use today!

The Haven received its name from the military men who was stationed in Kunsan in 1971. A contest was held and many names were submitted. But finally, Wayne Burgen's

submission - "The Haven"- was chosen because that is exactly what this ministry is – a haven for those who need spiritual rest while passing through Kunsan AB!



Initially, it was a non-denominational religious center but in April of 1974, the "American Serviceman's Baptist Church" was chartered and The Haven became distinctively Baptist in name as it always had been in doctrine anyway.

In February of 1979, the Haven moved to its first long-term location where it continued for over 25 years. The Haven moved again in 2005 to a location just outside the main gate of Kunsan AB until April of 2012. On 8 April, 2012 it came to its present location. Victory Baptist Church, a predominantly Korean ministry, and The Haven Baptist Church merged under the Haven name.

In 1981, the Gold River Baptist Church, a second Korean ministry was started. Pastor Yang Sung Lim has been the pastor there since the very beginning and the church is still going strong today.



THE STEWARTS – MARCH 1980 TO APRIL 2012



Bill and Linda Stewart took the reins of the ministry in March of 1980. Pastor Bill had been in Korea from October 1972 until April of 1974, stationed with the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Chorus and then later with the 55<sup>th</sup> Aviation Battalion at K-16.<sup>1</sup>

He was very active at the Christian Serviceman's Home in Seoul as well as other missionary endeavors and had come to Kunsan to visit the Haven in 1973 to preach a week-end evangelistic meeting. At that time, Pastor Stewart was in the US Army, stationed in Seoul, Korea.

Brother Stewart was led of the Lord to get out of the Army in 1975 and became an Associate Pastor in Twin Cities Baptist Church of Temple, Texas. During his time there, God used Gal 1:16 to call him back to Korea as a missionary.

In 1979, the Stewarts returned to Korea as missionaries. After their return, the Stewarts lived in Seoul, went to language school, and taught at Maranatha Seminary. He also preached in local Korean churches.

The Stewarts filled in for the Pierces while they took a two-week vacation. At the end of 1979, he was invited to come to the Haven and participate in the Haven's annual Bible conference.

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<sup>1</sup> K-16 is an Army airfield near Camp Colbern, located on the South-Eastern side of Seoul, across the Han River from Yongsan. K-16, also known as Seoul Air Base, is a small post located near the city of Songnam just outside of Seoul.

In early February of 1980, the Pierces informed Pastor Stewart that they were leaving and would like him to come and take the ministry. Bob Peirce said that if they did not come, the Haven would be closed. They arrived in Kunsan on 27 February, 1980, Linda's birthday, to take the reins.

In the fall of 1982, many missionaries in Korea had problems with immigrations and were told that they would have to leave the country and reapply for their Visas outside the country. After two weeks in Japan, the Stewarts returned but were told to leave again in January 1984.

But Pastor Stewart had such a strong burden for the GIs at Kunsan that he could not give up until he had tried again. There were other missionaries who faced the same problems. Together, they went to Seoul and presented their case at the Seoul Immigration Office and the Lord intervened. Once again, they were given Visas and allowed to continue their ministry. The Lord took care of them for many years. In October 1996, during the Haven's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, Immigrations gave the Stewarts permanent residency Visas!

The Stewarts also have four wonderful children, Ruth, Rebekah, Sarah, and Jonathan. These children became the younger sisters and brothers for many GIs passing through Kunsan.

The Stewarts served the Lord faithfully at the Haven for 32 years and on the 8<sup>th</sup> of April, 2012, Pastor Stewart handed the baton off to Pastor Jim Taylor.



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### THE TAYLORS

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In July of 1983, A1C Jim Taylor was stationed in Kunsan AB. It was during his first tour in Kunsan that he met another airman, Ronald Slepecki, who was a member of the Haven. After months Brother Ron's praying and witnessing, Jim finally accepted Christ on February 27<sup>th</sup>, 1984. After three tours at Kunsan AB, Jim retired and stayed in Korea as a missionary with Armed Forces Baptist Missions. He served there under the leadership of Pastor Bill Stewart and his wonderful wife, Linda, for 16 years before leaving to start Victory Baptist Church in 2003.

During the Haven's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, the Stewarts explained that they were growing tired and needed guidance concerning the Lord's direction for them and the ministry. As the summer progressed, it became more and more evident that the Lord was leading the Stewarts to move into the next phase of their ministry as furlough replacement missionaries for missionaries in Korea who have been unable to take a furlough.

One day shortly after Thanksgiving, the Lord brought the idea into Pastor Taylor's mind that the two churches ought to merge. But he was unsure if it was the Lord speaking or just his desire to see the Haven Baptist Church continue as a powerful ministry to Gunsan AB. However, those thoughts were confirmed when the very next week, Brother Stewart explained that he had had the same thoughts as well.

After a couple of months of discussion and prayer, Pastor Stewart and Pastor Taylor came to the agreement that if the two churches were going to merge, then God would have to make it clear by providing a facility large enough to accommodate a much larger ministry. Within the week, Pastor Taylor received news that another floor would open up in their current location with the possibility of purchasing the whole building in a couple of years.

We often hear about the sadness of a church split but very seldom hear of two churches merging! But that is exactly what the Lord had in mind! On April the 8<sup>th</sup>, 2012, Victory Baptist Church and the Haven Baptist Church began meeting as one.

### THE AARONS AND HURS!

Over the years, there have been short periods of time when the Haven was under the leadership of various "interim pastors".

From 1983 until 1984 the Stewarts were put out of Korea by the Korean government, which at that time was not very friendly toward Baptist missionary works. During that time period, Norm and Joy Johnston came to Gunsan from Gimcheon and filled in until the Stewarts could return.

It was during this period, in fact it was February 1984, that Pastor Jim Taylor was led to the Lord by another young airman, Ronald Slepecki. Ron was a faithful member of the Haven and was a very faithful witness for the Lord as well!



The Stewarts returned in late summer of 1984 and in 1988 left for another furlough. By this time Pastor Jim had grown in the Lord and the church ordained him to be the interim pastor from July 1988 until September of 1989. In fact, the Taylors interim pastored for three separate furloughs from 1988 until 2000.

From August 2005 to June 2007, Joe Lemon, who was saved in October of 1995 at the Haven, interim pastored for the Stewarts as well. During his time, he was able to put many of the pieces in place in order to facilitate a move from Young Wha Dong in Gunsan city to a great building right outside the front gate of the airbase.

There were a few other shorter time periods where a few good men filled in the gap for the Stewarts as well - Brother Jim Threlfall for 3 months in 1998; Brother Rick Mahaney from May to August of 2004. And we would be amiss if we did not also mention Brother Adam Wirick and Al Roberts who were a great help at various times over the years as well.

## THE HATS!

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As the old saying goes, “Home is where you hang your hat”. Most people who come to the Haven for their first time are normally overwhelmed by the sheer number of hats that hang in almost every room in the church! Literally hundreds of hats have been hung on the walls by men and women who found the Haven to truly be their home-away-from-home.

The custom was started by a few of the men who were an integral part of the Haven in those days - Cay Kline, Darrell Cowen, and Merle long. Cay and Darrel were assigned to the 554<sup>th</sup> CESRH and Merle was a weapons load crew chief. Back then, the men and women of the Civil Engineering Squadron would hang their hats in the squadron hootch. Cay, Darrell and Merle thought it would be a great idea to do something similar at the Haven. So when these men left for the states, they hung their hats and a new Haven tradition was born!

## POSTSCRIPT

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The Haven Baptist Church has never been a large church because the base itself is small and very transient. But the Haven has left a phenomenal mark on the world- at least 10 missionaries, nine pastors, one pastor’s assistant, and at least 33 others in full time service of some sort with another 20 men and women serving in other church leadership or staff positions. It seems that every year we hear from men and women who have long past through Kunsan AB and the Haven who are now serving in the ministry somewhere. All of these people came through the doors of a small independent Baptist church that sought to provide a “home away from home”. Many of them, if not most, left Kunsan AB saying, “I thank God for Kunsan!” One person put it this way, “I must needs go through Kunsan.” Watching men and women leave Kunsan and go out to serve God is meeting the mission!

