

A Chocolate, A Medal, and the ROK-U.S. Alliance

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“Small, round chocolate.” My father always talked to me about the small, round chocolate. In the years of South Korean hardship, which was called the period of spring poverty, the chocolate that was received from a nameless U.S. soldier was excellent food. As a small boy, my father could not bear to bite it for fear of its disappearing in a twinkle. The chocolate was so precious. He could forget hunger while the chocolate was melting in his mouth. From early in my childhood, I remember that he told his story about the chocolate and emphasized that we have to remember U.S. kindness. To achieve the economic development that was called Four Asian Tigers and to live in a free democratic state would have been impossible without the U.S. support. This sweet remembrance of my father remains as a legacy for his son.

June 2, 2016. Sixty-three years after my father received chocolates from the U.S. military, I got a chance to repay my father’s debt. The Central Coast Korean War veterans’ ceremony took place at Hartnell College hosted by Congressman Sam Farr. There were old soldiers who never die; they just fade away. Besides the old soldiers, there was a young F-16 pilot from the Republic of Korea who studies in the Naval Postgraduate School. The small, round chocolate, which was clutched in my father’s hands, was now changed into a small, round medal that I presented to Korean War veterans. Even though it took just one minute, we had to wait sixty-three years for this one minute. I and an old soldier were moved to tears. Since I cannot deliver sufficient gratitude with just “thank you,” I prepared a sentence that was “I am deeply grateful to you for your support.” I said those words again and again to express my and my father’s gratitude to the U.S. military.

A small, round medal. It was a crystal that was made from a small, round chocolate. We had to wait sixty-three years for it. I am the F-16 pilot of the Republic of Korea Air Force. Every year, I have helped ensure the cohesion between the United States and the Republic of Korea when I have participated in Max Thunder, Foal Eagle, or Red Flag, which are combined military trainings. I, however, found a real reason for a strong alliance in the ceremony. A small, round chocolate and medal—those are love beyond friendship. The U.S.-ROK alliance is the strongest alliance in the world because the alliance moves one's heart generation after generation.

