

'I Think I'm Going to Die,' Student on Korean Ferry Phoned

By Heesu Lee
Bloomberg News

April 17, 2014 – Park Ji Yoon hadn't wanted to go on her high school's trip to the South Korean resort island of Jeju. She hated riding on ferries.

When she called the grandmother who had raised her, more than 12 hours after the ferry had departed with her and more than 300 classmates on it, the girl's voice was shaking.

The two had spoken 90 minutes earlier, said Kim Ok Young, 74. Ji Yoon said then that the ferry hadn't yet reached Jeju.

This call was different.

The ship was sinking, Ji Yoon said.

"Grandma, I think I'm going to die," she said. "The ship is sinking and I'm holding onto the rail." Then the phone disconnected.

Kim reached her granddaughter one more time, she explained as she waited at the auditorium of Danwon High School in Ansan for word.

In that call, Ji Yoon said only "I have to go," then the phone cut off. At 10:09 a.m., she sent a text with a single Korean character, one that conveyed no meaning. Since then, nothing.

A list of names was posted on a large whiteboard at the school. Those who were accounted for were highlighted with a colored marker. Ji Yoon's name wasn't.



Almost 300 people are missing of the 459 on board the "Sewol," the South Korean government said, with three confirmed dead.
Source: Yonhap News via Bloomberg

"Two days before she was heading off on this trip, she told us that she didn't want to go because she didn't want to travel on a ferry," said Kim, wearing a brown coat and red-framed glasses. She had raised the girl because Ji Yoon's parents worked. "We told her that she would regret it if she didn't go. Now we regret it. We shouldn't have made her go."

Names List

Almost 300 people are missing of the 462 on board the "Sewol," the South Korean government said, with nine confirmed dead. The ferry sank en route to Jeju; local media including YTN TV reported it had sailed into rocks in foggy conditions. Of the 325 students, in their

penultimate year of high school, and 14 teachers, about 80 were accounted for by late afternoon, the notice at the school showed.

On the fourth floor of the school, crowds of relatives and friends of those on the ferry clustered in the auditorium. Several expressed anger at the school and the government for the lack of information, almost 11 hours after the ferry began to sink. Televised news of the disaster played on a large screen overhead.

One parent tore a piece off the list of names, prompting school officials to remove the board and replace it with a list of those who were hospitalized.

Students from other schools, the same age as those missing, also crowded into the auditorium to await news. They placed post-it notes on the desks of their friends.

School Friends

Danwon, a public school, was founded only in 2005, meaning that many of the students had done their elementary studies elsewhere. There were 388 students in the class, almost all of them on board. The school will be closed today and tomorrow, its website said.

Lee Jae Eun had seven friends from elementary or middle school on the ferry, none of whom were on the rescued list. She nervously held up her phone as she went through their pictures, her hands shaking as she flipped through them one by one.

"I know some of them from elementary school and some from middle school," she said. "This was their last trip before entering the last year of high school."

Korean Red Cross volunteers from the Ansan area, where the school is located, arrived late in the afternoon and began preparing rice, cup noodles, snacks, drinks and coffee. Donations of mobile phones, chargers and blankets were arriving.

Volunteer Won Jong Suk, 59, said the Red Cross workers probably would stay at the school for as long as 10 days.

Jindo Trip

"My heart dropped when I heard the news," she said. "We all have children and I am sad this happened to our neighborhood."

As the day drew to an end, many of the waiting parents left to make the six-hour bus ride to Jindo, the closest land point to the site of the sunken ferry. The buses were provided by the school. One uncle, Park Yong Woo, 48, said his nephew, Kim Soo Bin, was on one of the rescued lists. His parents are in Jindo but haven't found Soo Bin yet, he said.

"We can't trust the list and statements from the school or the government until we see him face to face," he said. "Different departments are releasing different names and information. Soo Bin's parents were crying when I spoke to them on the phone because they haven't yet found him in Jindo."

Park Ji Yoon's parents also went to Jindo as soon as they heard about the ferry, grandmother Kim said. They took dry clothes for their daughter.

– *Editors: Stuart Biggs, Anne Swardson, Peter Hirschberg*

Divers Seeking Life Inside Korea Ferry Hindered by Cold Sea

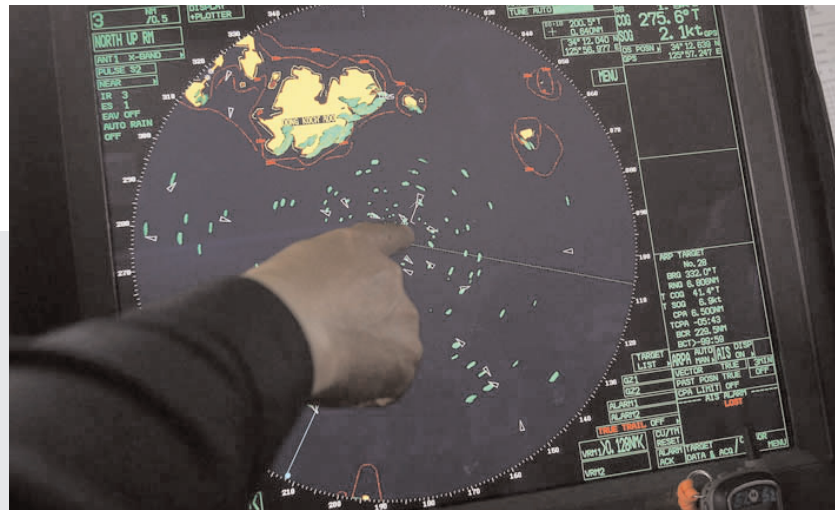
By Sam Kim
Bloomberg News

April 18, 2014 – Dozens of speedboats encircled the upside-down blue bow of the Sewol, the only remaining visible piece of the South Korean ferry that sank April 16. They each carried several rescue workers.

But only a handful of divers were actually in the water as the waves, rain and fog intensified yesterday, a sign of the difficulty in reaching hundreds of people who may still be trapped. From the pilothouse of the Mokpo Coast Guard 123, a vessel aiding the effort, a radar screen was packed with blurry green dots, showing how many boats were deployed in the search.

“You just can’t see much underwater in weather like this where there’s no sunlight, especially considering that the water in this area already isn’t very transparent,” said Kim Kyung Il, captain of the ship, as he gazed at the sea. “Adding to that is the chilly water. It’s generally very hard for anyone to last between one and three hours in water as cold as it is.”

More than 100 vessels, from naval corvettes to fishing boats, and 600 divers haven’t brought a living person from the ferry since the day the ship sank. Twenty five people are known to have died and 271 are listed as missing among the 475 on



A member of the South Korean Coast Guard checks the radar during the search for missing passengers at the site of the sunken ferry off the coast of Jindo Island on in Jindo-gun.
Photographer: Chung Sung-Jun/Getty Images

board. More than 300 of the passengers were students and teachers from Danwon High School in Ansan, near Seoul, headed to the resort island of Jeju.

As Captain Kim spoke, a voice came out of the on-board speakers: “A body is being retrieved at the moment,” it said.

Covered Mouths

A double-decker vessel carrying dozens of family members of those missing circled around the sunken ferry, watching the operations. Many people appeared to be crying, some of them covering their mouths with their hands.

Hundreds of other parents waited in a gymnasium at a sports complex on Jindo island, a

land point near the site of the sinking. Many sat on the wooden floor, wrapped in blankets, or lay on stretchers. Some were attended to by medical personnel; ramen noodles and coffee were served on tables in the hallway. Just outside the entrance, a television had been installed to broadcast news of the rescue effort.

“There is still hope,” said Park Young Woo, who believes his daughter remains trapped in the ferry. He was at the port at Jindo, about 20 minutes’ drive from the gym. Dozens of parents also stood on the docks, gazing across the water.

“Divers, please hurry, hurry,” Park said. “Don’t rest. Don’t stop. Rotate if you’re tired. Please do your best. All our children would already be home by now if you had done your best.”

Cow Costume

His wife, who declined to give her name or her daughter’s name, showed a video on her phone of the girl laughing while hula-hooping in a dairy cow costume. Smiling as she watched, the mother paused for a moment and pulled back her phone, worrying her daughter might feel embarrassed to know the footage was being shown to others. Like the other students, she is in her second-to-last year at Danwon.

Anger erupted at times in the gym. When one father heard that President Park Geun Hye was coming, he said Park was “just like any other politician trying to put on a political show.” He declined to give his name, saying he feared reprisals from the government. He said he no longer trusted the authorities because he suspected the government wasn’t serious about the rescue.

Park, for her part, vowed maximum effort and

stiff penalties for those responsible for the sinking, placing the palm of her hand over her ear at one point to listen to a family member amid the angry outcries. She had an aide take the phone number of one parent who wanted an update from her every day, saying, “Yes, I will check.”

Water Bottle

Prime Minister Chung Hong Won was hit in the head with a water bottle thrown by an angry parent as he left the building after a visit the previous day. Other parents pushed him and threw water on him.

The weather worsened throughout yesterday and by late afternoon was so foggy that an island a few hundred meters from the port at Jindo could only be seen in outline. Volunteers distributed blue, white, yellow and pink raincoats, one of the few spots of color at the scene.

Rescuers Wednesday had more success. Kim Young Min, a 50- year-old fisherman, got on his boat and started its engine as soon as he received a text message from a neighbor saying a ferry was sinking just off his island of Daemado. As far as he could see, two other boats joined him.

By the time he and his fellow fishermen arrived at the scene, the ferry was listing “90 degrees,” Kim said yesterday by phone. “As soon as I saw the ship and the passengers scrambling out, all I could think was, ‘This isn’t right.’ My friends and I started picking up anyone we could spot. It was too frantic for me to count how many we pulled out of the water. All I remember was, everyone I pulled out was a kid.”

Lucky Ones

Kim regretted he couldn’t save more, including

those whom he later learned were trapped inside the boat. The waters off Korea's southwestern coast are as cold as 11 degrees Celsius (52 degrees Fahrenheit).

"I feel terrible I was only able to save those lucky enough to make it to the deck," he said. "What about the kids who didn't make it? What did they do wrong not to deserve to be rescued?"

Kim was pessimistic about the search yesterday. "I can't help fearing they are either already dead inside or have drifted away," he said.

– *Editors: Rosalind Mathieson, Anne Swardson, Peter Hirschberg*

Korean Crew Member Tells of Pandemonium Before Ferry Sinking

By Cynthia Kim
Bloomberg News

April 19, 2014 – Oh Young Seok, one of at least 10 surviving crew on the Sewol ferry that sank off the South Korean coast, said the boat was tilting so quickly that passengers weren't able to reach the lifeboats.

"It's not as though we didn't want to help," the 57-year-old helmsman said in an interview yesterday outside Mokpo Hankook Hospital, during a break from police questioning. "The vessel was tilting so fast we couldn't reach any lifeboats. The ship was at 60 degrees and we were already walking on the walls."

Of the 476 people on board the Sewol, 28 are known to have died and 174 been rescued, leaving 274 people still missing from the April 16 sinking, which occurred off the southwest corner of the Korean peninsula. More than 600 divers have been taking turns to try to enter the sunken vessel to find survivors.

Oh, who said he wasn't at the controls when the accident happened, said other crew were inside the steering house.

"Truth is, only they would know exactly why, and what happened," said Oh, who has 10 years' experience working on ships. "No other crew members would know the reason, I guess."

South Korean authorities are seeking an arrest warrant for Captain Lee Joon Seok and two unnamed crew members, said Park Jeang Il, a press official at Mokpo Coast Guard station, where a combined police-and-prosecutor investigation team is based.

About 10 crew, including the captain, are under investigation over the cause of the ferry's sinking, Kim Su Hyeon, Commissioner of the Korea Coast Guard's West Regional Headquarters in Mokpo, said in a statement distributed by the security ministry. The probe will focus on whether the crew made any mistakes, if they broke any rules related to cargo, and if the ship had any faults, according to the statement.

Bridge Absence

Captain Lee, 69, wasn't on the bridge at the time of the sinking and he had assigned the third navigation officer to steer the vessel, Park Jae Uck, a prosecutor based in Gwangju, told reporters in Mokpo. "He may have returned to the wheelhouse as the ferry began tilting," he said.

Investigators are probing whether the ferry turned too quickly or abnormally. They declined to say what announcements were made as the ferry

sank, or whether passengers were told to stay in their cabins.

The 46 lifeboats on board the ferry had been checked on Feb. 10, according to Oh, who hurt his back during his escape. He was dressed in a white hospital gown and had an IV drip attached to his arm.

Functional Lifeboats

“All of the lifeboats were functional,” he said, sucking on his cigarette. “People came and opened all of them up to check and install them.”

Bodies found overnight and today all had life jackets on and weren’t discovered inside the ferry. They may have been trapped under the vessel, the coast guard said.

The ferry, owned and operated by privately held Chonghaejin Marine Co., listed and capsized in an area of the ocean as shallow as 20 meters (66 feet) in some parts, based on readings from a coast guard vessel used in the rescue operation. The ferry was en route from Incheon to Jeju island, popular with tourists and honeymooners.

“We know the rule,” said Oh. “The rule is to help the old and the weak, pregnant women, then other passengers, and then we should leave when it appears all have left, and the captain should abandon ship last.”

– *Editors: Stuart Biggs, Teo Chian Wei*

Two Hours Turn Class Trip Into Shipwreck Horror for South Korea

By Sam Kim
Cynthia Kim
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Bloomberg News

April 21, 2014 – It was supposed to be their last bit of teenage fun.

The realities of life would descend on the 325 students from Danwon High School near Seoul next school year in the form of cram time: nonstop study to prepare for South Korea's notoriously tough university entrance exams.

A four-day field trip to Jeju, a volcanic island whose white beaches and waterfalls lure hundreds of school groups each spring, was the planned distraction. The students would travel on a five-level ferry named "Sewol," meaning "time and tide." More than two-thirds of the passengers were from Danwon, adding a feeling of camaraderie to the adventure.

Ko Hyun Suk, 16, spent the days before the trip shopping for clothes to wear in Jeju. The chance to travel for the first time with friends rather than family added to the excitement for the boy and his classmates, Ko's mother said.

Not every Danwon student wanted to make the trip. Park Ji Yoon didn't like ferries. She decided to go only after her family said she'd regret it if she didn't, her grandmother said.

Now Ji Yoon is among the 302 passengers, most of them her classmates, dead or missing after



Almost 300 people are missing of the 459 on board the "Sewol," the South Korean government said, with three confirmed dead.
Source: Yonhap News via Bloomberg

the 479-foot, 6,825-ton Sewol capsized and sank on April 16 in water cold enough to induce unconsciousness within an hour or two of exposure.

The catastrophe, which first had President Park Geun Hye demanding "zero casualties" and then had her the target of wails and screams from parents angry at the constantly shifting information, has become Korea's worst maritime tragedy since 1970, when the sinking of the "Namyong" ferry killed 323.

Park said today the crew's actions were "like murder."

Wearing Tracksuits

The students' schedule had the plan laid out to the minute. They were to leave Ansan, where the

school is located, at 4:30 p.m. on April 15 and travel on buses to the port at Incheon, one hour away. They were on time when they boarded the Sewol: a long line of young people, some in gray and black uniforms and others in purple-and-white school tracksuits.

The 20-year-old Japan-made ferry was bought by Chonghaejin Marine Co. in 2012. The Korean company enlarged it during a four-month expansion that added another deck, increasing the total capacity by 116 to 956, and adding more room for vehicles. The refit design allowed space for one fewer crew member than before.

Prosecutors are investigating whether the expansion played a role in the sinking by making the ferry unstable.

The student group was led by Danwon Vice Principal Kang Min Kyu, along with 13 administrators or teachers. Others on board included Yang In Seok, 48, transporting cargo to Jeju with three other delivery men. The husband-and-wife team of Hur Young Ki, 45, and Park Eun Kyung, 43, also were delivering cargo, in their case metal components for a construction company. Their one-ton truck carrying the material was parked below with the other vehicles.

Late Departure

Among the staff, Choi Chan Yeol, 57, worked in the kitchen. Crew member Oh Young Seok, also 57, was a steersman, authorized to pilot the ship. On the bridge, Captain Lee Joon Seok, 68, was in charge.

The students were clearly the ones who were the most excited about what was scheduled as a 14-hour trip, clapping their hands in the dining room as news of the impending departure – two-

and-a-half hours late because of thick fog and bad weather – came over the loudspeakers.

The non-student passengers ate after the students, and Park and Hur noticed an unusual thing: Unlike a previous ferry voyage they had taken to Jeju, there was no safety instruction video showing passengers where to find the life jackets and how to put them on.

“I don’t know if it was just our room but they didn’t show it,” Hur said in the couple’s room in Mokpo Hankook Hospital in Mokpo, the nearest city to the wreckage, on April 20.

Fireworks Display

The students had a jubilant evening. Shortly after the ferry sailed from Incheon at about 9 p.m., they took turns dancing the limbo in the lobby on the ship’s third floor. At 10 p.m., all the passengers were invited to watch a fireworks display on the deck at the rear of the ship. It was foggy and windy, Hur recalled.

Entertainment indoors also included songs from two Filipino singers. Then the passengers bunked down in their cabins. Breakfast was at 8 o’clock the next morning, the students fed before the other passengers. Then they went to the game room or took photos with their phones on deck.

An Min Soo, another student on the trip, spoke to his mother by phone at about 8:15 a.m. All was fine. Fifteen minutes later, Park Ji Yoon’s grandmother called her to check on her. They were late, Ji Yoon said, though she didn’t know why.

Everything Falling

At about that time, Choi Chan Yeol, the kitchen worker, was cleaning up in the dining hall after breakfast.

The jolt was massive, he said.

“Suddenly everything was falling – all the kitchenware, the chairs, the long microphone that belongs to the singers on board, everything,” he said at the Mokpo hospital on April 18. He spoke in between psychological counseling sessions, treatment for a knee contusion and police questioning.

He was among those confirming that twice, at about 8:30 a.m. and at 9 a.m., an announcement over the ship’s speakers told everyone to don life jackets and stay in their current locations. He ignored the instructions. The ship was listing severely – the floor was becoming the wall, the walls were becoming the ceiling and floor.

Pushing Through

“It was scary as the ferry was tilting and water was filling up,” he said. “I found a long microphone cord on the floor that was connected somewhere. I don’t know where, but when I pulled it, it was strong enough for me to hold onto and walk till I reached the door of the restaurant hall. My knees hurt now because there was so much stuff I had to push through.”

The outside world began to learn that something was wrong at 8:55 a.m., with a radio call to navigational-assistance agency Vessel Traffic Services Center in Jeju. It was from an unnamed officer on the Sewol. The audio was supplied by the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries.

“Please contact coast guard. Ship is in danger. It’s listing now,” the caller said.

“Where’s your ship?” the vessel services operator asked.

“Please take measures quickly, please quickly,” the Sewol responded. And later: “Ship has listed a

lot. Can’t move. Please come quickly.”

The caller gave the location of the Sewol as next to Byeongpungdo island, about 90 kilometers (56 miles) from Jeju. The coast guard received the alert at 8:58 a.m., the security ministry said.

Emergency Calls

The Sewol was then contacted by Vessel Traffic Services on Jindo, an island hugging Korea’s southwestern coast. The passengers weren’t on lifeboats because of the boat’s angle in the water, the Sewol said in response to a question.

The VTS transcript shows that a ship named Doola Ace was 2.1 miles from the Sewol at 9:06 a.m. VTS asked the boat to move closer to the Sewol to aid the rescue. Twelve minutes later, the Doola Ace told VTS passengers were not evacuating.

“We cannot move alongside if people don’t evacuate,” the Doola Ace told VTS. At 9:23 a.m., the Doola Ace was “right in front” of the Sewol, waiting for people to evacuate.

“Even if it’s impossible to broadcast, please go out as much as you can and make the passengers to wear life jackets and more clothes” Jindo told the Sewol at 9:24 a.m. And a minute later the operator said: “We don’t know the situation there. The captain should make the final decision and decide quickly whether to evacuate passengers.”

‘So Many Passengers’

One minute later, the Sewol asked: “If they escape now, can you save them right away?” And then: “We have so many passengers, I don’t think a helicopter can save them all.”

Hur and Park were in their cabin when the jolt came. They’d taken the ferry before and had felt the

ship shake a great deal at this juncture of the journey. So it wasn't until a water bottle suddenly rolled across the cabin floor that they realized something was wrong. Park was thrown to the other side of the cabin, hurting her ribs. Hur grabbed onto a pipe.

They both heard the announcement: "Stay where you are. It's dangerous if you move." They donned life jackets.

Yang In Seok, the cargo transporter, ignored the order. By 9 a.m., he said, the ship was listing at a 45-degree angle. He bolted up from the third floor of the stern and even so, got to the deck just in time to see a helicopter hovering overhead. He spoke at an emergency center at a gymnasium in Jindo, one of the closest land points to the sunken ship, wearing a brace on his neck.

Scene of Chaos

Steersman Oh Young Seok described a scene of chaos, with the ship's angle putting the lifeboats out of reach for passengers and crew alike. He wasn't on the bridge when the ship began to list, so had no explanation for what happened.

"We wanted to help. We know the rule," he said as he dragged on a cigarette outside the Mokpo hospital during a break from police questioning, dressed in a white hospital gown with an IV drip attached to his arm. "The rule is to help the old and the weak, pregnant women, then passengers, and then we should leave when it appears all have left, and then the captain should abandon the ship last.

"But the vessel was tilting fast, we couldn't reach any lifeboats. I believe they were all functional but how can you reach them when you're walking on the walls already? Tilted to 60 degrees! All 46

of them were functional, I remember getting them checked on Feb. 10."

Away From Bridge

As for Captain Lee, he wasn't on the bridge when the problems began, authorities said. The ship was being steered by the third navigation officer, identified only by her surname Park. She was attempting to steer through a waterway known for rough currents called 'Maeng Gol Soo Ro' for the first time, investigators said. Another helmsman, Cho, was also on the bridge.

The captain returned to the bridge and gave the order for passengers to stay put. Then, prosecutors say, he turned up on one of the first rescue boats to leave the ship. In televised remarks as he was taken into custody, Lee said he gave the order for the vessel to turn, then returned "briefly to the cabin to look after something." The incident began while he was away from the bridge, he said.

Lee, who faces five charges including accidental homicide and negligence, was flanked by Park and Cho as he spoke. They face three charges including accidental homicide and violation of maritime law, prosecutor Yang Joong Jin said in Mokpo. The three are being held in custody at Mokpo Coast Guard station. Four other crew members have also been arrested.

"The announcements to stay on the vessel were issued because rescue boats hadn't yet arrived," Lee said. "The currents were extremely fast. The water was cold.

'Many Complications'

"Even if life jackets were worn, if we abandon the ship without a clear judgment you can be dragged far away," he said. "I judged that there

would be many complications.”

The rescue effort included not just coast guard, navy and other official vessels but a plethora of fishing and other private boats. Kim Hyun Ho, a 47-year-old fisherman, was at the scene by 10 a.m., 18 minutes after he heard an announcement from his community center speaker on nearby Daemado island saying boats needed to be mobilized.

“I didn’t know where to start,” he said by phone from his home on Daemado, where he fishes for anchovy and exports seaweed to Japan. “I saw people in life jackets on the ferry, which was about 90 degrees tilted and half in the water already, but there were people swimming in the water, too.”

He got about 25 people, mostly students, onto his boat, and transferred them to a larger vessel waiting nearby, he said. The Sewol was “sinking fast, I wanted to get more people out of the water but my boat is a small one.”

‘Too Frantic’

Another Daemado fisherman, Kim Young Min, 50, raced to the scene after receiving a text message from a neighbor.

“It was too frantic to count how many we pulled out of the water,” Kim said by phone. “All I remember was, everyone I pulled out was a kid.”

It was at about this time that Ji Yoon called her grandmother from the ship.

“Grandma, I think I’m going to die,” she said. “The ship is sinking and I’m holding onto the rail.”

Then the phone disconnected. Her grandmother reached the girl one more time, but Ji Yoon said she had to go. The last communication: a text at 10:09 a.m. with a single Korean character,

one that conveyed no meaning.

An Min Soo was luckier: He was on the deck playing with his friends when the ship began to list, his mother said by phone from her home in Ansan, asking that her name not be used.

In the Water

He held onto the rail but a nearby teacher told students to wear life jackets and jump into the sea, which An did, he told his mother. He was in the water for five minutes before a lifeboat rescued him, making him one of the first to be saved. His mother saw his name on the accounted-for list and got a text message from him after 10 a.m. to say that he was safe.

Park, Hur and the other passengers in their cabin barely made it out. After they donned life jackets, water began to flow into the room, eventually blocking the emergency door they could have used if they’d been told to evacuate. The only way out was a sealed window, and they weren’t able to break it with a fire extinguisher.

“There was a wardrobe that had life jackets in front of our cabin,” Hur said, wearing a back brace and speaking rapidly. “I took the doors off and took all the life jackets out. We used the wardrobe as a ladder as the water started to rise in our cabin.”

Somehow, he wasn’t sure how, rescuers broke the window and told the occupants to jump into the water. Park was lifted into a helicopter; Hur was taken onto a coast guard ship.

Rescued

Also rescued: Danwon Vice Principal Kang, the leader of the school trip, and student Ko Hyun Suk. Almost all of the 174 survivors were loaded onto boats that came from shore. President Park said

today only one of the 46 lifeboats supposed to be on the Sewol was deployed.

In Ansan, parents learned about the accident from a text sent by Danwon High School at 9:50 a.m., according to a timeline written on a noticeboard at the school. An Min Soo's mother heard the news from other people because she was at work. Park Ji Yoon's grandmother also heard it from others.

Danwon chartered more than 20 buses to take parents to the emergency center in Jindo. The parents of Ji Yoon were among the first to make the six-hour trip, carrying dry clothes for their daughter.

Contradictory Information

All the relatives encountered a contradictory, frustrating and ultimately devastating series of communications. Less than two hours after the Sewol began to sink, Danwon school officials said all of their students aboard the ship had been rescued, citing communications with the coast guard. That afternoon, the government more than halved the number of people it said had been rescued, from more than 360 to less than 170.

In Ansan, the school set up a center for relatives in a fourth-floor auditorium, with the Korean Red Cross and other groups serving noodles, rice, drinks and coffee. Televised news played on a large screen at one end of the room. Also displayed was a noticeboard with the names of students and teachers on the Sewol. As confirmation of their rescues came in, their names were highlighted with a purple or yellow marker. Most names – including Ji Yoon's – weren't highlighted.

During the evening, a frustrated parent tore part of it down.

'Regret It'

"Two days before she was heading off on this trip, she told us that she didn't want to go because she didn't want to travel on a ferry," Ji Yoon's grandmother said, speaking at the center in a shaking voice, tears running down her face, her brown handbag lying on the ground where she dropped it. She had raised the girl because Ji Yoon's parents worked. "We told her that she would regret it if she didn't go. Now we regret it. We shouldn't have made her go."

Teachers at the Danwon center were crying as well as they tried to deal with angry parents. Outside the school, ambulances stood by in case parents needed medical attention.

In Jindo, a fishing and farming island of about 34,000, relatives divided their time between the center at the gymnasium, which also offered television news, refreshments and a place to lie down, and the port itself, 20 minutes' drive away. There, they gazed into the fog that rendered the rescue operations impossible to see. They couldn't know until they returned to watch the television news how divers were struggling with poor underwater visibility and strong currents.

Cold Water

"What we wanted to know was what was happening, but no one was responsible enough to tell us," family member Ma Dong Yoon said April 18, reading a statement prepared by relatives of the missing passengers. "Even at that moment, the kids were probably screaming for their lives in the cold water."

The area leading to the dock was filled by tent after tent stretching for hundreds of meters providing food, raincoats and other necessities,

leaving just enough space for vehicles to pass.

Dozens of police officers were standing by.

“Divers, please hurry, hurry,” Park Young Woo, whose daughter, a Danwon student, had taken the trip, said as he stood on the dock, wearing a blue rain slicker. “Don’t rest. Don’t stop. Rotate if you’re tired. Please do your best. All our children would already be home by now if you had done your best.” His wife displayed a video on her phone of their daughter twirling a hula hoop and wearing a cow costume.

‘Terrible Sin’

Sorrow and sadness were expressed everywhere. Kim Han Shik, the 72-year-old chief executive officer of the ship’s owner and operator Chonghaejin Marine, said in a televised April 17 press briefing that his company had committed a “terrible sin.” Kim Young Bung, another company executive, bowed and apologized on behalf of the company at a separate press conference.

Investigators raided the company’s offices on April 17 to inspect operational manuals and other documents, though no executive had been called for questioning as of April 19, prosecutors said.

Park and Hur said they can’t stop thinking about the disaster. Their livelihood, in the form of their truck, their tools and the construction materials are gone, and their lives are changed.

“We can’t forget it and we will never be able to,” said Park. “My husband cries every time he talks about this. He can’t fall asleep at night.”

Sewol engine driver Jeon Young Joon, 61, said he feels guilty.

Level Three

“I really should have searched for some kids, I knew it was an excursion boat but I was in level three doing my logbook,” he said outside the hospital in Mokpo, smoking. “When I pushed the door open, which kept closing because it was tilted, there was no one in the corridor. I thought I would be one of the last.

“We’re old. These kids had no chance to try anything. I have had my days, at least. The captain really should have done more, much more. Yes, it was one of those moments where fear takes you over, but I’m sure he knew, leaving the ferry, that the kids he told to stay put were still there waiting for his instructions.”

Kang Min Kyu, the vice principal in charge of the group, knelt in front of the families at the gymnasium the night of April 17 with 10 other teachers, not all of whom had been on the ferry.

The next day, he was found hanged behind the gymnasium.

“It’s too much, being alive alone while more than 200 of my students are missing,” he wrote in a note found inside his wallet, police said. “Please place all the blame on me because I was in charge of the trip. Please cremate my body and scatter the ashes where the ship sank. Perhaps I should be a teacher for those missing children in the other world.”

– *Editors: Brian Fowler, Anne Swardson, Stuart Biggs*