

Building Bridges –
The US-DPRK 1994 Agreed Framework
and The US Army's
Return to North Korea

By

C. Kenneth Quinones, Ph.D.

Dean of Research and Faculty Evaluation
Akita International University, Japan

POSCO Grantee at the
East-West Center – Honolulu, Hawaii

Abstract

The quest for normal US-DPRK relations has proven more complex and time consuming to achieve than anyone could have imagined. Initially the effort, which dates from 1992, centered on the road map spelled out in the October 1994 bilateral Agreed Framework. While one of the accord's goals was to halt North Korea's nuclear weapons program, this was actually one of five US prerequisites for the normalization of diplomatic and commercial relations with North Korea. Doing so would first require replacing the Korean War's (1950-53) legacy of hostility with one of cooperation and mutual trust. The most enduring and one of the most successful undertakings in this regard was the US Army-(North) Korean People's Army Joint Recovery Operations of 1996-2005. The Bush Administration of 1989-93 had made recovery of US military Missing in Action (MIA) remains from the Korean War one of its priorities for the normalization of relations. Earlier, the US Senate had established its Select Committee on POWs and MIA Affairs to promote the effort regarding MIAs from all wars. This paper reviews the history of the US Army's effort in North Korea 1996-2005, and assesses its diplomatic, political and military consequences relative to the normalization of US-DPRK relations.

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List of Abbreviations

ACDA -	Arms Control and Disarmament Agency
CILHI –	Central Identification Laboratory, Hawaii (US Army)
CODEL -	Congressional Delegation
CPV –	Chinese People’s Volunteers
DOD –	Department of Defense
DOE -	Department of Energy
DOS –	Department of State
DOT –	Department of Treasury
DMZ -	Demilitarized Zone
DPRK –	Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea)
DPMO –	DOD Office of Prisoner of War and Missing in Action
EAP/K –	DOS Bureau of East Asia and Pacific Affairs, Office of Korea Affairs
HFO -	Heavy Fuel Oil
IAEA -	International Atomic Energy Agency
JCS -	Joint Chiefs of Staff of US military forces
JRO –	Joint Recovery Operation
KEDO -	Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization
KPA –	Korean People’s Army (DPRK)
LTC -	Lt. Colonel
MDL -	Military Demarcation Line
MAC –	Military Armistice Commission
MFA –	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DPRK)
MIA –	Missing in Action
NPT -	Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons
NSC –	National Security Council (USA)
POW –	Prisoner of War
PRC –	People’s Republic of China
ROK –	Republic of Korea (South Korea)
UN -	United Nations
UNC –	United Nations Command
US –	United States
USSR -	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

1. Finding Corporal LeBoeuf

It took the United States government 46 years to find Corporal Lawrence LeBoeuf. On a hot and humid day late in July 1996, an aging North Korean farmer led a small group of North Korean and American soldiers across a lush green mountain ridge to a shallow grave southwest of Unsan, North Pyongang Province, DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea). A century earlier an American company had won exclusive rights to mine the still productive gold mine at Unsan. Sixty years later, on a frigid November morning in 1950 some 20 miles south of the China-DPRK border, bugles blared as thousands of Chinese "People's Volunteers" rushed up the ridge toward advance elements of the US Eighth Army. The corporal was one of some 800 American soldiers who died in the ensuing battle.

The farmer, a teenager in 1950, followed his father's instructions and buried LeBoeuf in his fox hole where he had died. Nearly a half century later most of LeBoeuf's military equipment had vanished except for a small can of coffee, a canteen cup, and his metal identification or "dog" tags. We collected the corporal's remains, including his blond hair, confirmed his identification, and later his family was notified in Brooklyn, New York.

The search for Corporal LeBoeuf and his fellow soldiers achieved impressive results between 1996 and May 2005, but then Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld abruptly and unilaterally ended the effort. Presented here is merely the endeavor's beginning and more apparent accomplishments. Eventually a fuller account hopefully will materialize.

2. Erasing the Past

Finding Corporal LeBoeuf was part of a complex effort by the United States and the DPRK to erase the Korean War's (1950-53) legacy of mutual hatred and mistrust with the aim of normalizing relations. The October 1994 bilateral Agreed Framework, the two nations' first diplomatic agreement, aspired to do much more than halt North Korea's nuclear weapons program. Most students of the 1994 Agreed Framework have focused on the negotiations that produced the accord and the subsequent international effort to build two nuclear reactors in North Korea. Actually ending North Korea's nuclear programs was but one of five prerequisites for achieving normal relations. This focus and the passage of time have dimmed memories that the accord served primarily as a road map for achieving the normalization of US-DPRK relations.

When the agreement was being formulated, both sides recognized that successful implementation required more than mere words on paper. Unlike agreements between the United States and other former enemies, Americans and North Koreans shared nothing but a legacy of killing and quarreling. The framework's authors knew that building mutual trust and fostering mutual cooperation were imperative for the accord's success and to sustain peace on the Korean Peninsula. They built into it a series of "simultaneous steps" and confidence building programs designed to gradually nurture a positive attitude toward trust and cooperation.

This study aims to begin broadening our perspective of the Agreed Framework beyond its nuclear aspects and to clarify its ultimate goal - normal relations between Washington and Pyongyang.

3. Setting the Stage for the Agreed Framework

Glancing back at the history of US-DPRK contact prior to the Agreed Framework reminds us that their sole channel of communication 1951-92 had been the Military Armistice Commission (MAC) created by the Korean War Armistice of 1953. Meetings of the MAC convened in Panmunjom, formerly a village mid-point in the De-militarized Zone (DMZ) that became the de facto border between North and South Korea. There representatives of the United Nations Command (UNC), mostly US military personnel, frequently clashed with their North Korean People's Army (KPA) counterparts. These meetings were not negotiating sessions, nor made any effort to end the Korean War. Rather they continued the war using words and propaganda.

Real diplomatic communications between Washington and Pyongyang commenced only after 1988 when the so-called "Beijing channel" opened. It facilitated limited bilateral diplomatic communication in the hope of resolving problems before they escalated into armed confrontation. But it was not until January 1992 that the two sides' diplomats finally sat down face to face to discuss their nations' differences. This meeting on 22 January 1992 in New York City brought together ranking officials from both sides for a single day. Each side simply stated what it expected the other to do before bilateral relations could be normalized.

Preconditions for Normalization

The United States listed five preconditions for the normalization of relations:

- An end to North Korea's nuclear program,
- continue South-North Korea dialogue,
- facilitate the recovery of American MIA remains from the Korean War,
- cease the export of ballistic missiles, and
- renounce publicly reliance on international terrorism.

All but the export of ballistic missiles became core elements of the Agreed Framework.

US-DPRK Negotiations 1993-94

A second major step toward improved relations followed when diplomats again met in New York in June 1993 to negotiate a halt to North Korea's withdrawal from the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). This first series of meetings yielded two important developments: the first joint statement and the establishment of the so-called "New York" channel.

The 11 June 1993 US-DPRK Joint Statement formed the Agreed Framework's foundation. It committed both sides to exchanging concessions of equivalent value. North Korea agreed to "suspend" its withdrawal from the NPT and to maintain "full scope nuclear safeguards" under International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)

monitoring. The United States also promised not to use or threaten to use armed force against the DPRK.

At the same time, the so-called “New York channel” was opened to facilitate direct communication between DOS in Washington, DC and the DPRK Mission to the United Nations in New York. Originally it consisted of telephone and fax communication between the author, then North Korea Affairs officer in the DOS’ Office of Korea Affairs (EAP/K).

A third significant step came on 24 August 1993, when US Air Force Major General Nels Running, representing the UN, and his KPA counterpart Major General Ri Dok-gyu, representing the KPA, signed the “Agreement on Remains-related Matters.” The accord committed both sides to “cooperate with each other in locating, exhuming, repatriating and identifying the remains of UNC personnel located north of the Military Demarcation Line (MDL).” The “UNC side” promised to “render support, as necessary, to aid the KPA’s” efforts. Also promised was the establishment of working groups to formulate specifics for the accord’s implementation.

The fourth major step materialized in February 1994 when DOS/EAP Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Hubbard and DPRK Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN Ho Jong forged the “Agreed Conclusions.” It formalized the process of both sides taking “simultaneous steps” when implementing their bilateral agreements. This meant that they must act at the same time when implementing concessions of equivalent value. The aim was to gradually build mutual trust and confidence. For North Korea, “simultaneous steps” remains a fundamental principle regarding its relationship with the United States. Washington, however, assigned waning significance to the concept after the Clinton Administration left office in January 2001.

These four elements taken together initiated the forging of mutual trust and cooperation. Also established prior to the Agreed Framework’s signing was both side’s commitment to having the DOS and DPRK Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) play the lead roles in bilateral communication and the improvement of relations. Soon elements of the US DOD and the KPA would take issue with this premise.

4. Implementing the Agreed Framework

Once the Agreed Framework had been finalized in October 1994, its implementation hesitantly began with a series of simultaneous steps:

- Pyongyang “froze” all activity at its Yongbyon Nuclear Research Center,
- It allowed US nuclear experts to visit the center and to negotiate an accord to facilitate placement of 8,000 nuclear spent fuel rods in long term storage under IAEA monitoring,
- the US was to ship 50,000 metric tons of heavy fuel oil (HFO) to North Korea as compensation for its having shut down the 5 megawatt nuclear reactor at Yongbyon,
- US would host negotiations about opening diplomatic liaison offices in each others capitals,
- US would begin phasing out selected economic sanctions on North Korea, and
- UNC and KPA would negotiate an agreement to facilitate the recovery of US Korean War MIAs.

Then US chief negotiator DOS Assistant Secretary of State for Politico-Military Affairs Robert Gallucci assumed responsibility for overall coordination of the US effort and formed teams to implement various aspects of the agreement. The Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA) and the Department of Energy (DOE) would oversee the so-called Spent Fuel Project at Yongbyon. DOS/EAP/K would handle the liaison office issue while DOD Prisoners of War (POW) and Missing in Action (MIA) Office (DPMO), UNC and US Army Central Identification Laboratory, Hawaii (CILHI) would implement the 24 August 1993 MIA recovery accord.

DPRK Outpaces US

From the beginning, the DPRK jumped ahead of the US when it came to carrying out “simultaneous steps.” Within two weeks of the Agreed Framework’s signing, the US Spent Fuel Team was able to make a highly successful visit to Yongbyon, confirm that the nuclear reactor had been shut down, and negotiated the outline for an agreement regarding storage of the 8,000 spent fuel rods. Meanwhile, the IAEA resumed monitoring activities at the center.

The United States, however, struggled with funding shortages and bureaucratic turf battles. This delayed for almost one year initiation of the spent fuel storage operation and prevented regular deliveries of HFO for two years. The spent fuel project proved much more difficult to carry out than anticipated, but the lack of funds also impeded progress and it was not completed until late 1997.

North Korean confidence in the US commitment to the Agreed Framework further eroded when the US failed to supply HFO on a timely and regular basis. From the beginning, the US was unable to fulfill its promises in this regard. Although the US formed the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) in March 1995 to provide the HFO and to construct the two nuclear reactors promised Pyongyang in the Agreed Framework, DOS had responsibility for collecting funds for KEDO and its HFO shipments. The lack of money for the purchases and shipments seriously impeded the program until South Korea assumed responsibility for KEDO funding in 1998.

Liaison office negotiations began on a positive note early in December 1994, but soon encountered debilitating problems. Both sides quickly hammered out an agreement in principle. When the US insisted that its diplomats transit between Seoul and Pyongyang via Pamunjom, the MFA could only promise to do its best to convince the KPA to allow this. The day of the MFA delegation’s return to Pyongyang, 17 December 1994, a US Army helicopter pilot strayed repeatedly into North Korean air space. Lacking means of communication with the US army, the KPA shot down the helicopter, killing its pilot and capturing the passenger. DOS Deputy Assistant Secretary Thomas Hubbard traveled to Pyongyang to resolve the incident and signed a written apology. The incident stymied progress on opening liaison offices. Late in 1995 it was agreed that the Swedish embassy in Pyongyang would represent the United States while DPRK Mission to the UN would serve as North Korea’s liaison office.

Nor did the phasing out of sanctions improve the situation. The US Department of Treasury (DOT) hesitated for several weeks before beginning to phase out selected sanctions as promised in the Agreed Framework. Finally it authorized Americans to

make telephone calls to North Korea and to use US bank issued credit cards in Pyongyang. Pyongyang was not impressed.

Meanwhile, US-DPRK negotiations dragged on about the type of nuclear reactors to be built in North Korea. When the Agreed Framework reached its first anniversary, North Korea had much more to brag about than the United States regarding the accord's implementation. Rather than pulling back, the MFA intensified efforts to impress the US Congress with its "sincere" attitude, possibly hoping to compel the US government to catch up. Such thinking might also explain why the MFA became increasingly involved with the MIA issue and began to press the KPA to accommodate US Congressional concerns in this regard.

5. Historical Context of the MIA Remains Issue

When the Korean War ended, 8,100 American soldiers' remains had yet to be accounted. The 1953 Korean War Armistice required all parties "to cooperate in the search for, recovery, and return of remains." Between 1954-91, about 1,000 MIA remains were recovered in South Korea. North Korea during the same period returned about 1,934 sets of UN MIA remains through the UNC Military Armistice Commission (MAC) at Panmunjom. This left an estimated 5,000 to 6,000 US MIA remains still in North Korea. The August UNC-KPA 1993 "remains-related agreement" aspired to facilitate the recovery of these remains, but continuing tense relations between the UNC and the KPA retarded implementation.

One irritant was North Korea's circumvention during the 1980s of the UNC. Pyongyang repeatedly engaged private US citizens, veterans groups and members of Congress on the remains issue. Seoul suspected, and the US ambassador there agreed, that North Korea's overtures via unofficial channels aimed to use the remains issue to manipulate Washington into direct talks with Pyongyang without either Seoul's or the UNC's participation. The UNC also worried that the KPA was attempting to undermine its role as the primary channel for the Korean War Armistice's implementation. Subsequently Washington barred its officials from meeting North Koreans other than at Panmunjom. Late in 1986, the KPA accepted "on a humanitarian basis" information from the UNC about US MIA remains and a month later proposed joint US Army-KPA recovery teams to locate MIA remains. DOD chose not to respond.

Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs

It is important to place the DPRK's overtures in the context of US-Vietnamese relations during the 1980s. The Vietnam War also had produced hatred between the US and Vietnam. But the American families of US MIAs from that war, supported by American Vietnam War veterans, pressed their government to intensify the search for MIAs believing that some might be alive in the jungles and prisons of Southeast Asia. Lending further impetus to this was President George Bush's assignment of top priority to the recovery of all US MIAs.

The Senate Select Committee on POWs and MIA Affairs emerged under the co-chairmen Senators Bob Smith, Republican from New Hampshire, and John Kerry, Democrat from Massachusetts. The committee prodded DOD to initiate joint recovery

operations (JRO) staffed by members of the US and Vietnamese armies to recover US MIA remains in Vietnam. These JROs commenced long before the two enemies normalized their relations, but their success contributed to the relatively rapid normalization of US-Vietnamese relations in 1995.

In 1987, the DPRK asked the Soviet Union's embassy in Washington to invite select US Congressmen to a meeting in New York to discuss the MIA issue. Nothing came of the overture until January 1990 when DPRK Ambassador Ho Jong met House Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Sony Montgomery in New York to discuss the repatriation of remains. Five months later, the KPA handed five sets of remains to the Congressman at a UNC organized ceremony at Panmunjom. For a while, Ho Jong became the main point of contact between the US Congress and the DPRK government.

Senator Smith had the Vietnam JROs in mind when he met Ho Jong in New York in February 1991. He cautioned Ho that his government should avoid trying to "imitate Vietnam" by using the remains recovery as a device to entice Washington into normalizing relations with Pyongyang.

Senator Smith next met a DPRK delegation at Panmunjom in June 1991 which included DPRK First Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Kang Sok-ju, who later became the DPRK's chief negotiator in the US-DPRK 1993-94 nuclear talks. After a private meeting between Smith and Kang, DPRK officials gave the senator eleven sets of US MIA remains. Smith's priority was to press for information about any living Americans, POWs or otherwise, in North Korea. Kang, while promising to look into the matter, seemed intent upon by passing the MAC and working directly with the US Congress, but Smith avoided making any commitment to Kang. North Korean officials also continued to insist there were no living American MIAs or POWs in North Korea.

During 1992, the KPA re-engaged the MAC on the remains issue by expressing interest in concluding another agreement, but rejected a US proposal for JROs. Instead the KPA for the first time asserted a claim for compensation of expenses connected to its prior unilateral recovery and repatriation of US MIA remains. This shifted the focus from recovery and return to money which stymied progress until August 1993.

6. Senator Smith Goes to Pyongyang

Senator Smith led the first US Congressional delegation (CODEL) to Pyongyang 19-21 December 1992. It was the first visit by a Senator and a US diplomat (the author) to North Korea. Also accompanying him were a US Marine Congressional liaison officer and a member of the Senator's staff.

Initially acting Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger, fearing that a US diplomat's participation in the CODEL might arouse suspicions in Seoul that the US was making a fundamental shift in its North Korea policy opposed an American diplomat's participation. Also, at the time South Koreans were electing a new president. But chief National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft supported the senator's request and the author traveled to Pyongyang.

It was dark and frigidly cold when the CODEL reached Pyongyang by plane from Beijing. A huge portrait of North Korea's founder and "Great Leader" stared emotionlessly down on them as they stepped from the airplane. The diplomat's presence delayed the party's admission into the DPRK. The KPA immigration officers refused to

admit the representative of a “hostile government” bearing the diplomatic passport of a government with which there were no diplomatic relations. Finally the KPA and MFA compromised. The MFA promised to keep me in “detention” during the visit by escorting me constantly and restricting my movements.

At an MFA guest house we learned that no food rations had been arranged for either dinner or breakfast. But for breakfast we would be served the same box lunch provided during our flight from Beijing: cold sausage, fried egg, sliced cucumbers and tomatoes, cake and flavored soda water. Each of us was assigned to sleep in a separate house, none of which were heated and lacked hot water because the “Chinese had stopped shipping oil.”

Only then were we told that our luggage had was still in China and no flights would arrive from Beijing until the day of our departure. Tired, cold, hungry and unwashed, we retired for the night. Clearly the quality of life in Pyongyang, even for elite visitors, left much to be desired.

Pyongyang POW/MIA Talks

Sunday morning 20December, after a cold breakfast in a cold banquet room, we convened discussions with MFA officials. Bob Smith and Kang Sok-ju, who also served as the Supreme People’s Assembly’s Vice Chairman of the Foreign Affairs, cordially exchanged views. Smith asked repeatedly whether there were any living American prisoners in North Korea and the extent of Chinese handling of UN POWs during the Korean War, etc. He stressed that his primary purpose was to ensure that the DPRK appreciated Americans’ intense desire for a full accounting of all Korean War US MIAs. North Korea’s cooperation in this regard could improve the atmosphere between the two nations. He explained that he had neither the authority nor desire to negotiate anything and urged the DPRK to conclude a new agreement with the UNC regarding compensation for MIA recovery related expenses.

The Senator did not ask for or receive any remains. Instead he urged that the KPA in the future preserve the context of the site where remains were discovered to improve prospects for identification. To achieve this he proposed that North Korea give the US government access to all documents and artifacts it might have concerning POW’s, their handling during the war and the sites where they were housed.

The North Korean side promised to provide access to archives, but urged that first bilateral technical talks be convened to sort out specifics. Regarding China, the US side was advised to raise with Chinese authorities their control over UN POWs after their military intervened in the fall of 1950. The North Koreans claimed that some photographs of American POW camps had been taken in northeast China during the war. They also confirmed what Smith had learned earlier in Moscow – some US Army and Air Force personnel were sent to Russia for interrogation. Some 26 US Army and 15 US Air Force personnel were returned from the Soviet Union to POW camps in China and North Korea, the North Koreans claimed.

A calm and cordial atmosphere prevailed and nothing of substance was agreed upon. The Senator pressed to visit North Korea’s Korean War museum, officially named the “Memorial Hall to Commemorate the DPRK Defeat of US Imperialism.” His requests were repeatedly rejected but finally Kang offered to do his best to arrange a visit.

After a pleasant, warm luncheon, the senator asked me to go shopping. My MFA “escort” agreed to take me to one department store to purchase what the senator needed. He wanted some basic toiletries plus “hair spray” to control his unruly hair. I quickly learned that polite persistence would gain more than adamant assertiveness. Eventually I was able to visit three department stores searching for hair spray. This enabled me to see most of central Pyongyang. I obtained most of what the CODEL needed except hair spray, but even bought my wife a few souvenirs. Meanwhile, the CODEL rested.

Monday morning 21 December began on a positive note. After a warm Western style breakfast, we paid a courtesy call on the Chairman of the Supreme People’s Assembly Yang Hyon-sop, a relative by marriage of then North Korean leader Kim Il Sung. A tour of the enormous Mansudae Supreme People’s Assembly Hall followed. Afterwards, to our amazement, we headed to the war museum – a massive gray, frigid and dimly lighted building.

We were told that we could only tour a single room. After some grumbling, we realized that if we each headed in a different direction at the same time we could view much more than if we stayed together. Our ploy worked. We even explored the basement and photographed a floor to ceiling collage of pictures that depicted hundreds of American POWs being marched to prison camps. Piled on the floor in front of the display were hundreds of American rifles, helmets, uniforms, personal belongings and regimental battle flags. The display was designed to convince North Koreans that their army had defeated the United States “imperialist” army.

After a car tour of Pyongyang we enjoyed a friendly farewell banquet with much informal chatter and Pyongyang style vodka. Senator Smith had clearly impressed the North Koreans with his earnestness, patience, candor and adroit handling of sensitive issues. The visit succeeded beyond everyone’s expectations. Only the UNC in Seoul was uncomfortable because the CODEL’s success posed a threat to the UNC’s continuing management of the MIA issue. There after, DPMO and DOS would play the lead role in handling the issue.

7. The Nuclear Issue Leaps to the Forefront

Evidence collected by the IAEA during its first inspection of the Yongbyon Nuclear Research Center in June 1992 and US satellite photographs taken in August 1992 strongly indicated that North Korea was attempting to hide the truth about its prior plutonium production. At issue were North Korea’s compliance with its promises under the NPT, its pledges under the Joint South-North Korea Declaration on the De-nuclearization of the Korean Peninsula (December 1992) and its ability to fabricate a plutonium nuclear bomb.

Patient, persistent diplomacy failed to induce Pyongyang’s cooperation. The IAEA, responsible for the NPT’s implementation, at the end of February 1993 determined that DPRK must submit to a “special” inspection of its nuclear facilities. On 11 March North Korea declared its intention to withdraw from the NPT at the end of the mandatory 90 waiting period. An international crisis ensued until North Korea agreed to engage the US in negotiations. They yielded the 11 June 1993 agreement that “suspended” North Korea’s withdrawal from the NPT and enabled the negotiations to

continue. These eventually produced the Agreed Framework of October 1994 (see above).

8. UNC-KPA MIA Talks Resume

The UNC and KPA signed a new “Agreement on Remains-related Matters” on 24 August 1993. It supplemented and expanded upon the more general terms of the Korean War Armistice regarding this issue. Also both sides affirmed their willingness to cooperate in “locating, exhuming, repatriating and identifying remains of UNC personnel north of the MDL (Military Demarcation Line).” For the first time the US military agreed to “render support” to the KPA’s efforts and to form a working group of technical specialists and observers to settle the specifics of recovery and identification procedures.

No sooner had the agreement been signed than progress ceased. The KPA interpreted “render support” to mean that the UNC owed it three million dollars to compensate for costs associated with the 162 sets of remains repatriated between 1990 and 1993. This impasse persisted until the spring of 1996. In September 1994, CILHI sought to break the impasse by inviting a KPA delegation to Hawaii for talks, but the invitation was declined.

9. Return to Pyongyang’s War Museum

Meanwhile, the Agreed Framework had been signed in October 1994 and its implementation initiated. I was assigned as the DOS liaison to the US Spent Fuel Team (see page 7). My job was to promote cooperation between the DOE contractor hired to work at Yongbyon and North Korea’s General Bureau of Atomic Energy. This required that I live and work for several months at Yongbyon during 1995.

In October 1995 I again visited the Korean War museum in Pyongyang. I was able to roam throughout the building, accompanied only by an English speaking female KPA guide. One large room displayed North Korea’s air defense system during the war. There I spotted and photographed the military identification cards of five American airmen whose B-29 bomber had been shot down near Pyongyang.

Back in Washington I gave copies of my pictures to LTC Marty Wisda, DPMO’s Korea Affairs officer. A couple of days later he excitedly told me that the five identification cards belonged to previously unaccounted for MIAs. DPMO then asked me to contact the DPRK Mission to the UN. With DOS approval, I called DPRK Minister Han Song-ryol, a long time counterpart during the nuclear negotiations, and informed him of the US government’s interest in obtaining more information about the five MIA airmen. Shortly thereafter DPRK Institute for Disarmament and Peace Director Ambassador Kim Byong Hong at a private dinner in New York hinted that the impasse over compensation might end if it was discussed in a civilian rather than military channel.

Han contacted David Brown, EAP/K director to tell him that, “Kim Byong-hong is the person in the MFA responsible for the remains issue.” Han inquired if the September 1994 CILHI invitation (mentioned above) was still available. Brown informed DPMO of Han’s inquiry and DPMO quickly issued a new invitation for seven DPRK officials to visit CILHI to resume MIA talks.

Aloha Hawaii

With uncharacteristic speed, Washington and Pyongyang agreed to convene MIA remains talks in Honolulu 10-12 January 1996. We anticipated that the KPA's demand for compensation would top the agenda. Stormy weather delayed the talks' start until 12 January. In Honolulu, the US Army did its best to impress the DPRK delegation, the first time KPA members visited the United States. Everyone stayed at the plush Illikai Hotel on Waikiki Beach next to the Hilton Hawaiian Village.

After breakfast 12 January, the two delegations headed to Hickam Air Force Base near Pearl Harbor to convene the talks. The chief delegates James Wold, US Army retired general, and KPA Senior Colonel Pak Rim-su of the KPA's Panmunjom Mission rode together in the same sedan. The KPA, being the guests, spoke first. To ensure clarity, I obtained a copy of their talking points. Pak declared that the DPRK had already fulfilled its requirements under the Korean War Armistice regarding the POW/MIA issue. But since Pyongyang considered the issue a humanitarian one, it had continued discussions of it with the UNC. He concluded that the negotiations at Panmunjom had become "a spinning wheel talk only to come to a deadlock."

In classic KPA negotiating style, Pak declared that the US position remained unacceptable. He claimed that "our soldiers are strongly protesting against the US remains recovery, enraged by the continuous hostile policy of the US against our country. Since the US is making a preparation for a military adventure against us, we cannot but take counter-measures to cope with it." (Comment: This was a reference to the annual spring US-South Korea joint military exercise Team Spirit.) Continuing, Pak asserted, "... if the remains issue can be solved smoothly, the hostility and belligerence should be removed" between our two countries. He added, "... and the hostile policy of the US against us should be removed." To drive his point home, Pak reiterated, "Only when the US promise to remove hostile policy and take practical measures complying with the spirit of the DPRK-US framework agreement, can our people and army men believe it." (Comment: "Framework agreement" refers to the 1994 Agreed Framework. Pak's comments continue to echo 12 years later at all US-North Korea talks.)

Pak then turned to compensation. He asserted that "... priority should be given to the discussion of the issue of compensation for the labour (sic) work, material, equipment and facilities used up and damaged in searching for, disinterring and identifying the US remains. (Comment: None of the returned 162 sets of remains could be identified because no information had been compiled about where they had been found or any other details. Also, some of the remains had been mixed together, making it impossible to separate them by individual.)

The US delegation had come prepared to reach quick agreement on the compensation issue in the hope of moving to an agreement on joint recovery operations (JRO). According to DPMO's draft agreement dated 14 January, the UNC would agree to reimburse the DPRK two million dollars, and 1 February 1996 in Panmunjom had been selected as the date and place for payment. But the KPA demanded three million dollars which DPMO rejected.

Clearly the KPA was in control of the North Korean delegation and MFA officials were primarily observers. The talks quickly came to resemble the verbal dueling that characterized MAC meetings at Panmunjom rather than the diplomatic negotiations that

had produced the Agreed Framework. By the afternoon of the first day, the talks reached an impasse when Pak rejected the idea of US-KPA JROs pending agreement on compensation.

That evening I huddled with MFA Politico-Military Affairs Section Chief Cha Song-nam. He was the soft spoken diplomat who informed me in 1992 that CODEL Smith's luggage had been left in Beijing. Cha and I met several times during my subsequent visits to North Korea. During one visit I asked about his family. He said that he had two children. When I asked about his wife, he said she hated Americans. On my next visit to Pyongyang, I gave Cha some American candy to give to his wife so she could pass it to their children. Apparently this small gift was completely unexpected and greatly appreciated.

In December 1995, Cha almost died when a KPA car rushing him to Panmunjom crashed near Kaesong. The MFA had dispatched him to Panmunjom in a KPA car to confirm that the helicopter incident had been resolved and that the KPA should release the detained US pilot and his dead champion's remains. En route an elderly Korean woman abruptly appeared on the highway in front of the speeding car, causing the car to crash. Two KPA officers died and Cha and the driver were seriously injured. Despite several broken bones and serious cuts, Cha continued his journey in another car to deliver Pyongyang's orders. Only then did he go to the hospital. In 2006, after service in New York, Cha became the DPRK ambassador to the United Kingdom.

At the Honolulu talks, Cha and I sought to find common ground so that the talks might end on a positive note. We decided to formulate a joint statement that would list areas of agreement and issues still to be addressed at future talks. But discussion of our proposed statement was deferred until the talks' final day after both delegations had toured CILHI. There we learned of the sophisticated techniques US JROs used in Vietnam to locate, recover and identify MIA remains.

When the talks resumed, the atmosphere quickly turned negative. Pak, relying on typical KPA tactics used at Panmunjom, pressed for more compensation. He simply did not know how to negotiate. For him and his KPA colleagues, the goal was victory, not compromise and cooperation. This exhausted the DOD delegates' patience.

Early the next morning we loaded the KPA delegation in a van and sent it to the airport for an early return to Pyongyang. Clearly the KPA mistakenly assumed that the US was so eager to resume the repatriation effort that Washington would accommodate all of Pyongyang's wishes. As the sun peaked over Diamond Head and brightened Waikiki beach, the KPA headed home. Later DOD released a neutrally worded press release that concluded, "The talks failed to resolve any of the problems that have blocked progress on this important humanitarian issue."

On 20 January, once the DPRK delegation had reached Pyongyang, the MFA released a rather harshly worded statement that read in part, "DPRK-US talks on the remains of GIs were held in Hawaii at the proposal of the US from 11-14 January. ... a complete agreement could not be reached owing to the unreasonable stand of the US side."

Return to the Negotiating Table

At first glance the MFA statement was disheartening. It suggested that the impasse would persist, but there was a shuttle reason for optimism. Until then the KPA had played the lead role on the remains issue but the MFA had issued the statement. This suggested that the MFA might take over from the KPA. Confirmation of this came three weeks later when Han Song Ryol on 13 February 1996 in an “oral message to EAP/K explained his government was prepared to resume the remains negotiations in late February or early March in Panmunjom. Han also expressed confidence that major outstanding issues (i.e. compensation and JROs) could be resolved.

Kim Jong Il's Objectives

At the time the MFA had North Korean leader Kim Jong Il's confidence. Estranged from its long time primary allies China and Russia, North Korea in 1996 appeared to be on the brink of economic and even political collapse. Its economy was bankrupt, its foreign trade had evaporated and its people were suffering famine.

Kim Jong Il saw successful implementation of the Agreed Framework as imperative for his regime's survival and thus was eager to project a cooperative attitude toward the United States. His officials complained about but demonstrated patience with the erratic HFO deliveries, the stymied opening of liaison offices, and tardy US initiation of the spent nuclear fuel project. The KPA, however, had persisted in its traditional belligerent attitude toward the US government. Possibly to soften Pyongyang's image and to project a more cooperative image to the US Congress and DOD, Kim Jong Il shifted responsibility for the remains issue from the KPA to the MFA.

The New York Agreement

On 1 March, DOS responded positively to Pyongyang's overture to resume the remains talks. Instead of meeting in Panmunjom, EAP/K and DPMO concurred on reconvening in New York in late April. The MFA agreed in principle, but Col. Pak insisted on meeting his UNC counterpart Col. Ormes on 20 March in Panmunjom. Again Pak's foremost concern was compensation. Ormes deflected Pak's repeated demands that compensation be resolved prior to the proposed April talks. Pak finally accepted the fact that the KPA could not get any money until formal talks reconvened in New York.

Pak's efforts convinced US officials that the MFA and KPA were pursuing separate goals. The KPA's objective was to get US dollars, but the MFA was more interested in building positive relations and political capital with Washington. Sensitivity to these divergent goals helped ensure success for the US at the New York talks. Nevertheless, some in the US government remained convinced that the North Koreans were trying to manipulate US negotiators by playing a game of “good cop, bad cop.”

All the while, DOD and DOS kept the ROK government informed about the MIA remains negotiations. They emphasized that the issue was a humanitarian, not a bilateral political matter. While Washington was glad to keep Seoul fully informed, it emphasized that Seoul's involvement was unnecessary and undesired.

On 24 April, I was authorized to contact a senior DPRK diplomat in New York regarding Pyongyang's response to the US invitation to reconvene MIA talks in New York, which were now scheduled for early May. My contact told me that the KPA was reluctant to accept the US invitation and suggested that the US propose new dates for the talks. He said the KPA believed it was gaining nothing from its cooperation. The same official indicated that his government was prepared to approve compensation worth two million dollars and suggested that the US be prepared to make the payment when the talks resumed in New York. As for the US primary concern - JROs - the diplomat said his government accepted the proposal in principle but specifics would have to be worked out in technical talks.

On 29 April, Han formally informed EAP/K that his government would resume the MIA remains talks in New York on 4 May 1996 and provided the names of the DPRK delegates. Ambassador Kim, not Col. Pak would head the delegation.

The talks convened at the Hyatt Hotel in New York's Grand Central Station on 4 May. From the start they did not go well. Compensation immediately emerged as the problem. Ambassador Kim repeated North Korea's demand for three million dollars and General Wold countered with one million dollars. After several exchanges, EAP/K Deputy Director Richard Christianson reiterated Wold's position and urged the DPRK to demonstrate "sincerity." This visibly displeased Ambassador Kim. Toward the end of the morning session, Wold doubled the US offer to two million dollars but Kim still expressed dissatisfaction. The session ended inconclusively with both sides agreeing to take off the afternoon and possibly even the next day.

That evening Wisda, the author and DOS interpreter Tong Kim joined the DPRK delegation for dinner. Ambassador Kim, who was suffering from a cold and jet lag, complained that the US offer of two million dollars was unacceptable but reiterated his government's readiness to move forward on the MIA issue. (Comment: This suggested that the DPRK side was leaning toward accepting the two million dollar offer.) Pak Sok-gyun, Deputy Director of the MFA's North American Division, complained that the rhetoric had become unnecessarily heated, a reference to Christianson's comment that discussion of the Agreed Framework was unwarranted and that the DPRK should demonstrate sincerity. Pak reiterated that the DPRK had already demonstrated its "sincerity" regarding the Agreed Framework and resolution of the MIA issue.

Kim followed up on Pak's comments saying he had come to negotiate with Wold, "no one else." This too was a clear reference to Christianson's frequent interjections during the morning session. Kim concurred with Pak's earlier assessment that the KPA saw the US commitment to the Agreed Framework as being "empty since it had given nothing except the symbolic gesture of lifting of sanctions." He pointed out that KEDO, not the US government, was providing HFO. (Comment: Ambassador Kim's comments accurately characterized the US contribution to the Agreed Framework at that time.) After dinner Wisda and the author took Ambassador Kim to a drug store to purchase medicine to treat his cold.

The talks resumed Monday morning after the DPRK delegation had recovered from jet lag, illness and also had received additional instructions from Pyongyang. By then Christianson had returned to Washington. Although the 6 May discussions again proved inconclusive, the DPRK appeared to be probing the US side's resolve regarding its two million dollar offer. Once convinced that the US would not offer more, the DPRK

accepted the offer. Ambassador Kim then quickly agreed in principle to the holding of US Army-KPA JROs. That evening the UNC/MAC representatives expressed displeasure with DPMO's handling of the negotiations. Wold, however, had the support of the White House, DOD and DOS, and over ruled UNC's objections.

The May 1996 New York Agreement

The morning of 9 May James Wold and Ambassador Kim signed the "New York Agreement on USA-DPRK Remains Talks." The text follows:

1. The US side expresses appreciation to the DPRK side for its past sincere efforts in recovering and returning 162 sets of US servicemen's remains. The US side will pay the DPRK side two million US dollars during the week of 20 May at Panmunjom for the costs associated with labor, materials, equipment and facilities used by the DPRK.
2. Both sides agreed to a working level meeting during the first half of June at a place to be determined. At this meeting, they will discuss the specific timing, sites, personnel and all other necessary requirements, including any reimbursement for expenses in support of these joint recovery operations. Both sides expect this technical meeting will result in joint recovery operations this year.
3. Both sides express their belief that this agreement in New York City will contribute to the improvement of US-DPRK relations.

James W. Wold
(signed)

Head of the US delegation
Deputy Assistant Secretary of
Defense for POW/MIA Affairs

(Written note: Both sides agreed this compensation will not serve as a precedent for any future compensation.)

Kim Byong Hong,
(signed)

Head of the DPRK delegation
Director, Ministry of Foreign
Affairs

Paying Compensation

Payment of the two million dollars was set for 20 May in Panmunjom, but the transaction proved far more complex than anyone could have imagined. Also, the amount excited claims among the program's critics that the US government had "bought" MIA remains from the KPA to the benefit of Kim Jong Il's regime. Actually the principle of compensation followed the precedent set by the US MIA recovery effort in Vietnam. That program provided the Vietnamese government agreed upon reimbursement for specific expenses such as a laborer's daily salary, compensation for farmland or forest disturbed during excavation, the cost of transporting personnel, food, and supporting equipment to and from recovery sites, etc.

In the case of North Korea, it was impossible to specifying compensation for expenses connected to the remains returned 1990-93. Instead DPMO preferred to settle the matter with a single, lump sum payment. The Vietnam JRO schedule of reimbursement would be applied to all future JROs in North Korea, a

matter to be determined at future technical talks. Although groundless, critics' claims that the KPA was paid for remains persisted and gradually eroded public support for the US-KPA JROs.

CODEL Richardson

One of the more bazaar incidents involving the MIA recovery effort occurred during US Congressman Bill Richardson's (Democratic Representative from New Mexico) second visit to North Korea. Richardson, a personal friend of President Clinton who later served in his cabinet as Secretary of Energy and Ambassador to the UN, first visited Pyongyang in December 1994 during the US-KPA helicopter incident. He attempted unsuccessfully to obtain the release of the surviving American pilot and his deceased companion. Actually the MFA asked the DOS to urge Richardson, because his assertive behavior was complicating resolution of the incident, to return to Washington. The incident was resolved after his departure and without his assistance.

Richardson next visited Pyongyang in May 1996 shortly after the New York MIA Agreement had been signed. DPMO deputy Alan Liotta and DOS/EAP/K deputy Christianson accompanied him. Again the Congressman's assertive tendencies almost sparked a bilateral incident.

Liotta had briefed the congressman about the New York accord before the visit and while in Pyongyang settled with the MFA the dates and place for US Army-KPA JRO technical talks. At some point while Liotta was resting, the Congressman proposed to MFA officials that the DPRK accept food aid as compensation for future MIA remains repatriation. When Liotta learned this, he pointed out that this would be inconsistent with the 9 May New York Agreement and established DPMO policy. Christianson sought the National Security Council's (NSC) view via telephone about the Congressman's offer, but Washington rejected it and apparently reminded the Congressman that US law bars members of Congress from negotiating on behalf of the US government.

Richardson withdrew his offer, but not without consequences. His departure from Pyongyang via US Air Force jet was delayed for several hours while the KPA tried to convince the Congressman to win Washington's approval of his food aid offer. The KPA finally relented and CODEL Richardson belatedly departed. DPMO did not again seek the advice or assistance of Congressman Richardson and Mr. Christianson.

10. Joint US Army-KPA Recovery Operations

Technical talks to establish procedures for the first JRO commenced near Pyongyang on 8 June 1996. KPA experts accompanied by MFA officials met their American counterparts Col. Bill Jordan, Captain Mario Garcia, Sergeant Frank Tauanuu (all of CILHI) plus LTC Wisda of DPMO and the author of DOS.

When Colonel Pak joined the talks, progress slowed. His aim was to squeeze the US for as much money as possible for each category of compensation. Patience in the smoke filled room soon dissipated. At 3 A.M. the

MFA intervened and as the sun rose an agreement was hammered out. Discussion of specific compensation amounts was deferred until the JRO had commenced.

Ten US personnel were authorized to enter North Korea to conduct JRO #1. Eight CILHI experts would live and work at the JRO work site near Unsan, about 150 miles north of Pyongyang near the DPRK-China border. Two US personnel, Wisda and the author, would provide liaison between the JRO field team, the DPRK MFA and US government while residing at Pyongyang's Koryo Hotel. Upwards of 90 KPA soldiers would provide security and labor while the US side would supply sufficient food, equipment and vehicles to support all JRO members living in the field for 20 days.

Logistical Problems

Two developments complicated logistical support. The JRO schedule required that all US personnel, equipment and food arrive in North Korea by 9 July only three weeks after the JRO agreement had been reached. Also the Defense Attaché at the US Embassy in Beijing disallowed any JRO support by his office.

DPMO turned to me for assistance. Only one US company then had legal permission to do business with the DPRK. Daniel Murphy, a retired US Navy admiral who was a former CIA deputy director and a close personal friend of President George Bush, had established Nikko of New Jersey in 1989 to export up to one billion dollars worth of "basic human needs" to North Korea using a US government license issued by the Department of Commerce. He teamed up with a Korean-American rice dealer and together they exported several millions of dollars worth of grain to North Korea 1990-93. When North Korea defaulted on payment, Murphy sold his half of the company to his partner who formed a new company called B&B. B&B retained the license which enabled it to do business with North Korea.

DOS/EAP Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Bill Clark had introduced me to Murphy in my capacity as the North Korea affairs officer early in 1993. When the US Army turned to me for help in 1996, I provided CILHI's contract officer the firm's contact information and reclused myself from all negotiations and transactions that ensued. CILHI on its own contracted B&B, which had a branch office in Beijing, to provide logistical support for the first JRO.

B&B purchased 8 Jeep Cherokees, 3 cargo trucks, a micro bus, tents and other camping equipment such as propane gas stoves and electric generators, plus food. Meanwhile, using my home fax, I chartered 3 Air Koryo cargo flights to transport the JRO equipment and food from Beijing to Pyongyang. When Air Koryo required advance cash payment of \$30,000 for each flight, the standard international fee, CILHI asked B&B to advance the money to Air Koryo.

JRO Advance Team

I teamed up with the JRO advance team, Major Cohen and Sergeant Tauanuu, in Beijing on July 1. After confirming that the necessary equipment had been purchased and that the cargo flights were arranged, we departed for Pyongyang on 4 July.

Once admitted into the DPRK, a KPA officer accosted us in the airport parking lot. Sweating profusely because of the heat and humidity, he harangued us as representatives of a “hostile military force” which required that we be placed in “detention” until further notice. Protesting proved futile since we were outnumbered several million to one. I conceded that we could be temporarily housed in Kobongsan Guest House outside Pyongyang instead of the Koryo Hotel as previously promised.

Enduring Mr. Cho

We then endured three days of virtually constant harassment at the hands of a rude and intensely anti-American fellow, a Mr. Cho. He claimed to be from the MFA but more likely was with the Ministry of Internal Security. He denied all our requests, including permission to make telephone calls. After repeated confrontations, I told him that unless he allowed me to visit the MFA, North Korea’s Olympic Team would not be able to obtain visas to attend the 1996 Olympiad in Atlanta, Georgia. When I showed him the letter I had from the US Embassy in Beijing that invited North Korea’s Olympians to apply for visas, he directed that I be driven to the MFA.

No sooner had I told my amiable diplomatic counterpart of our plight than he promised we would be moved to the Koryo Hotel and then went in person to the guest house to oversee the arrangements. There after we met daily with MFA Cha.

The JRO Cargo Arrives

The first cargo flight arrived at 1:30 AM 8 July. Our KPA hosts guided us to the USSR built IL-76 jet as it parked. The opening of the large rear doors revealed much more than the JRO cargo. Two Isuzu cargo trucks (each filled with bottled water purchased in China) and a Jeep Cherokee were slowly backed out of the airplane. A cargo pallet filled with CILHI equipment followed. Then emerged four huge tires, a US made Hewlett-Packard computer server and other communication equipment, all addressed to the DPRK Ministry of Telecommunication), plus cases of European wine and liquor.

He had been told that taking pictures was permitted, but when Tauanuu, a large man from American Samoa, photographed the cargo, a KPA officer seized his camera. The stunned and angered sergeant restrained himself. My demand that the camera be returned was rudely rejected. A few minutes later, however, the camera was returned, the KPA officer disappeared and another KPA officer commended the sergeant’s restraint.

The cargo was stored in nearby warehouses for temporary storage pending customs clearance. While the JRO advance team returned to the guest house to rest, two KPA officers spent the night guarding the cargo in the mosquito infested and sweltering warehouses. Surprisingly the two KPA officers greeted us cheerfully when we visited them the next morning.

Two more cargo flights arrived early 9 July with 7 Jeep Cherokees, tents, small generators, propane gas stoves and related equipment plus a ton of rice, and a variety of condiments and fresh vegetables. The sight of the Jeeps angered Colonel Pak and a KPA officer tried to pry the “Jeep” symbol from one vehicle. Pak boomed that being seen in Chinese made Jeep Cherokees would embarrass the KPA when the UN World Food Program used much more expensive Toyota Land Cruisers. His grumbling ended after

we explained that the US designed jeeps had been purchased to minimize possible criticism from the US Congress.

The absence of US Army “meals ready to eat” (MRE) became a much more contentious issue. Col. Jordan had promised at the technical talks to supply sufficient MREs for 90 persons for 20 days, but then CILHI decided against this. Col. Pak accused CILHI of “insincerity” and failing to keep its promises. Resolution finally came after DPMO authorized providing the KPA sufficient money to purchase beef and other fresh food for the JRO’s KPA members.

The main JRO team arrived the afternoon of 10 July from Beijing. Clearing their luggage through customs was a fascinating experience. Each of the eight US members brought one US Army foot locker filled with personal items including food and clothing. The DPRK customs officials required each locker be opened and its contents carefully examined. A large hunting knife was seized as were magazines with pictures of nude women, but only after each picture had been carefully examined.

Then yellow and brown bags were found. Unable to read the packages’ English labels, the customs officials squeezed the contents and concluded that the bags contained “bullets!” I quickly opened a bag, ate a couple of “bullets” and passed the bag around to the customs officials. After hesitantly tasting the contents, all roared with laughter and the bags were admitted to the “fatherland.” They contained M&M chocolate covered peanuts.

As soon as the JRO team’s gear had been loaded, KPA drivers drove the convoy north to the JRO site. The trip took nearly six hours, first over a four lane expressway but then another four hours on very rough, unpaved roads. Upon arrival, US JRO team leader Major Joyner received the following written statement:

Warning Notes for the Personnel of the US Side

1. Recovery works of the remains shall be stopped immediately and all the personnel of the US side be withdrawn from recovery site in case that they make or take disgraceful remarks and acts against the Great Leader (Kim Il Sung) and our respected Supreme Commander (Kim Jong Il), or make statements slandering our socialist system and that they take pictures and make video tapes recording the objects which has nothing to do with the recovery work of the remains without our permission.
2. The personnel of the U.S. side is not allowed to go out of this area (camp and working site) or go to a village in the vicinity and meet soldiers and people.
3. The personnel of the U.S. side shall use telephone in Hyangsan Hotel (more than a two hour trip over rough dirt roads) when they need to have telephone communication with their personnel staying in Pyongyang and use of any communication instrument is not allowed.
4. Those who violate these rule shall be punished according to the law of our country.

Only once during the JRO’s nine year history was a US JRO member expelled from the DPRK for verbally confronting a KPA officer in front of KPA enlisted men. Armed KPA guards, rain, heat and humidity plus isolation made for miserable living conditions at the JRO camp. A small amount of water was provided each day for

washing but no bathing facilities were available. The KPA soldiers ate freshly cooked meals twice a day but the Americans survived on MREs and canned food that they had brought with them from Hawaii. Everyone drank bottled water brought from China.

JRO Liaison Team

Meanwhile Wisda and I lived at the Koryo Hotel. Every other day we traveled to the JRO site because there was no other means of communication. We took with us what fresh food we could purchase. At the site, we reviewed the situation with the JRO team leader. If an issue could not be resolved quickly at the site, I would visit the MFA the next day in Pyongyang to discuss the issue with an MFA counterpart. This proved mutually beneficial because it minimized the risk of confrontation at the site while facilitating smooth cooperation for both sides.

In Pyongyang, the liaison team worked with the MFA to establish a medical evacuation plan from the JRO site to Pyongyang, surveyed medical facilities in Pyongyang, and negotiated successfully an air evacuation route by US Air Force aircraft from Pyongyang to Japan. We also traveled to Panmunjom to arrange for Corporal LeBouef's remains repatriation to the UNC on 29 July.

A Bitter Sweet End

Unfortunately, the first JRO ended on a negative note. Senior Col. Pak continued to press for maximum compensation despite having agreed to accept fixed sums for specific expenses. The last day of the JRO's stay in Pyongyang ended with the KPA officers demanding outrageous sums of money which the US side rejected. When the KPA persisted in its claims the next morning, the entire US group boarded their DPRK driven vehicles and headed for the airport and their flight to Beijing. Stunned, the KPA assumed that the MFA would bar our departure. When this failed to happen, a KPA colonel rushed to the airport and demanded payment. Since all of the Americans had processed through immigration when he arrived, he could reach the Americans. I was directed to tell the KPA officer that he could either accept payment as determined according to the agreed guidelines, or get nothing. When he reluctantly agreed to the offered amount, I paid him and had him sign a receipt confirming that he had received full payment. The US team then departed. Col. Pak was furious but helpless. The MFA must have facilitated our departure.

11. The JRO Endeavor in its Political and Historical Context

Relatively speaking, the first JRO went fairly smoothly. There were numerous minor confrontations, disagreements and misunderstandings, but each was resolved through patient dialogue, several with the MFA's help. After all, this was the first time in history that members of the two still hostile armies had ever worked together. Until the summer of 1996, members of the US Army and KPA only shared memories of their predecessors having killed each other during the Korean and Cold Wars.

It had taken decades for politicians, private veterans organizations, soldiers and diplomats from the United States, North and South Korea to overcome a half century of

intense hatred, distrust, and superpower rivalry to initiate the US Army-KPA Joint Recovery Operations. Initiated in July 1996, the JRO continued until May 2005.

The JROs proved more successful in terms of their duration and the extent of US-North Korea cooperation than anyone could have foreseen. Literally hundreds of soldiers from two hostile armies experienced working together. Thousands of ordinary North Korean citizens in Pyongyang and the country side saw American soldiers riding with and working with members of the KPA. Hundreds of North Korean airline stewardesses, customs officials, drivers, hotel clerks, waiters and waitresses, cleaning personnel, museum guides and farmers witnessed the peaceful return of the American army to North Korea.

Another largely ignored benefit was the ability of the United States Army to survey what was happening in much of North Korea. During the subsequent spring, summer and fall operations, American military personnel were permitted to travel far beyond Pyongyang and pass through most of North Korea's provinces, including areas closed to UN and foreign humanitarian organizations. During these trips it was possible to determine normal and abnormal patterns of activity. The KPA actually assisted in this regard by allowing the American soldiers increasing access to wider areas for their travel to former battle fields. Never before had the US military been able to so accurately assess conditions in North Korea, evaluate its political intentions, and witness the levels of economic and military activity.

The DPRK MFA considered the presence of American soldiers an informal but effective guarantee that the United States would not attack while JRO teams were present. This acquired increasing importance after President Bush declared in 2002 his strategy of pre-emptive strike against any nation he felt threatened the United States' security and after he identified North Korea to be an "axis of evil" member.

During the nearly decade of cooperation, no American soldier in North Korea experienced any willful harm at the hands of North Koreans or committed any serious offense against a North Korean or the government. Despite tense, difficult and highly regulated living conditions, all American soldiers in the JRO program conducted themselves in a manner that discredited the highly distorted image of American soldiers and citizens that the DPRK government had projected to the North Korean people for almost half a century.

The operations ultimately located and returned to the United States the remains of nearly 500 American soldiers missing in North Korea since the Korean War and which now await identification at the US Army's Central Identification Laboratory (CILHI) in Honolulu, Hawaii.

A decade of joint effort is too brief to erase a half century of animosity between the nations, two governments and two armies. Sadly, the greater the JROs' success, the more resolute became its opponents in Washington, D.C. to end them. From the very beginning, ranking US officers in the UNC saw the JROs as undermining their authority and that of the MAC regarding its oversight of the Korean War Armistice. Some South Korean politicians and political pundits claimed that the program's compensation of expenses sustained the North Korean dictatorship at a time when it appeared near collapse. Even some members of American humanitarian organizations shared such views.

Overlooked was the reality that the US Army had peacefully returned to North Korea and had worked without incident with its arch enemy. This accomplishment came when the United States government was wrestling diplomatically with North Korea to end its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs, and South-North Korean hostility often flared to the brink of war. Indirectly, the JROs gave cooler heads in each government reason to resolve differences through dialogue rather than confrontation.

The JRO success began in 1996 and 1997 just as official North Korean confidence in the US government's ability to implement the 1994 Agreed Framework was waning. Many in Washington sought to separate the JRO effort from the Agreed Framework, insisting it was "humanitarian" and unrelated to the politically oriented Agreed Framework. But Pyongyang never accepted this. It insisted that the two elements were "simultaneous steps" linked to the primary goal of achieving normal bilateral US-DPRK relations. After all, this interpretation was consistent with the preconditions that the US government had set forth at the January 1992 bilateral talks.

Pyongyang insisted that its cooperation with the JROs obligated Washington to respond in kind by intensifying efforts to more effectively implement the Agreed Framework. Specifically this meant between 1996-98, regular deliveries of HFO and intensified efforts to begin building the two nuclear light water reactors promised in the Agreed Framework. Actually, effective implementation of both elements began in 1998 only after the South Korean government took over responsibility for funding and managing KEDO. By then Pyongyang's critics of the Agreed Framework formed a potent chorus that challenged the US credibility regarding the accord's implementation. As evidence, they pointed to the growing number of Congressmen who attached the Agreed Framework as an example of "appeasement" and as supporting a totalitarian regime insensitive to human rights. Congress gradually approved measures that restricted the US government's ability to effectively implement the agreement. When the Bush Administration entered the White House in 2001, it moved to either re-negotiate or to discard the Agreed Framework.

Ultimately critics of both the Agreed Framework and the JROs achieved their goal. In 2002, the Bush Administration discarded the Agreed Framework claiming that Pyongyang had failed to fulfill its commitments. At the end of May 2005, US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, citing unspecified threats to US military personnel involved with the JROs in North Korea, ordered an unilateral halt to them. US Secretary of State Rice promptly proclaimed that she, not Rumsfeld oversaw US policy toward North Korea. But the damage had been done. The KPA immediately declared that the cooperation had ended and was unlikely to resume. Ever since, not a single member of the US military has been able to work in North Korea or to engage their North Korean counterparts in rational dialogue. Also, the US military is once again blind to what is happening inside North Korea.

Meanwhile, the memories of cooperation are fading while the remains of Corporal LeBeouf's fellow soldiers await recovery and return to their homeland.

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