

TRIP TWELVE TO PYONGYANG

January 14-18, 1997

Trip Itinerary:

January 10-11, 1997 - Los Angeles - Friday-Saturday
January 12-14, 1997 - Beijing - Sunday - Tuesday
January 14 -18, 1997 - Pyongyang - Tuesday - Saturday
January 18-19, 1997 - Beijing - Saturday-Sunday
January 19 - 20, 1997 - Seoul - Sunday-Monday
January 20-22, 1997 - Tokyo - Monday-Wednesday
January 22, 1997 - Washington, D.C. - Wednesday

January 14, 1997 - Saturday

The bright orange sun had just peeked over the horizon as I arose from my comfortable bed at the Great Wall Sheraton Hotel in Beijing, China. Frigid Siberian winds sweep across northern China in January, making for dry cold weather and crystal clear blue skies. I turned on the television. The news was stunning. A major earthquake had shaken Kobe, Japan. The damage to buildings and roads was astonishing. How many people had died remained unknown. Fortunately, I was far away in Beijing, China, but I was concerned about my friends in Kobe.

There was little time to ponder. Soon I would be checking out of the hotel and heading to Beijing International Airport for my 12th trip to North Korea. Accompanying me would be Joel Wit, a long time colleague and chief of the Office of Korea Affairs Agreed Framework Division at the Department of State. Joel was making his first visit to Nyongbyon for his first up close assessment of the two year old spent fuel project.

Our departure from Beijing was delayed by an hour. Snow the previous day, a charming and warmly bundled Air Koryo hostess explained, had delayed the arrival of the flight from Pyongyang. Just after noon, we boarded Air Koryo flight JS 152 and headed northeast. Half of the seats were empty, and there were very few foreigners. I counted less than ten, including the deputy director of a UNICEF project in Pyongyang. No Japanese were aboard. A family of three sat behind me in row eleven. Their young daughter, a cubby eight or ten year old, softly sang "Cinderella to herself.

As we began our approach to Pyongyang Airport, a stewardess sat next to me and engaged me in conversation. She was curious, to say the least, about where I had learned Korean, then seemed to doubt my answer about having studied in the United States. An attractive, well groomed and pleasant young lady, she said she had traveled to Beijing, Bangkok, Moscow and Berlin.- all the major foreign designations on Air Koryo's flight schedule. She claimed to be a native of Pyongyang and said she had studied English and German at the Pyongyang University of Foreign Languages. Joel, a bachelor, sat quietly on my right, obviously eager to learn what I was talking about with the young woman.

Beneath our wings, a blanket of soft white snow embraced the northern half of the Korean

Peninsula. Lakes and rivers sparkled as the sunshine reflected off the solid sheets of ice that covered them, bringing to mind the landscape from the movie Doctor Zhivago. How nice, I thought to myself, to be home with my wife and family in our warm family room rather than flying high above the frozen landscape of North Korea.

Pyongyang's gray concrete structures appeared on the horizon, jarring me back to reality. Cars and trucks crawling over ice encrusted roads became visible as our plane descended toward Pyongyang's airport. The only chimneys exhaling smoke were the two towering smoke stacks of Pyongyang's main power plant. Elsewhere, no smoke was visible coming from the multitude of farm houses, villages and towns despite the frigid weather.

Farm fields lay frozen. Here and there small mounds of "compost" formed brown spots on the recently fallen snow. All across North Korea beginning in mid-January, the rural population began to deposit compost in the rice paddies and corn field, as the now deceased "Great Leader" Kim Il Sung had annually directed. This was the first step to prepare the fields for the spring planting of rice and corn. The "compost" was mostly dirt. Little of the previous fall's yield of rice straw remained for mixing with the dirt to form real compost. Absent sufficient coal, the rice straw served as a substitute when cooking food and heating water. Today the fields are empty of people, probably because it is simply too cold to work out doors, especially when one's stamina has been depleted by a shortage of food.

Surprisingly, the snow had been cleared from the runway. In the distance I saw a truck using blasts of compressed air to blow the snow from the concrete runway. The terminal was dark and so cold that I shivered although protected by several layers of clothing. Tons of cargo seemed to pass us on the slow turning luggage conveyor belt as we waited for our suitcases to appear. Forty minutes later, our luggage finally appeared.

Two representatives from the Foreign Ministry greeted us and we immediately climbed into our cars and crawled across the ice covered road to Pyongyang. Only a few warmly dressed soldiers walked along the side of the road. Otherwise, there were no pedestrians. A few kilometers from the airport, our two car motorcade joined a long line of vehicles awaiting clearance through the check point. Beyond the check point, Pyongyang's streets and sidewalks were virtually empty. The abundance of ice everywhere made it treacherous either to walk or drive.

The staff of the Koryo Hotel remembered me, although a year had passed since my previous visit. All smiled and bowed their heads in recognition. No sooner had we checked into our separate rooms than the lights went out. Joel, standing in the dark, cold hall, asked what had happened. I told him the citizens of Pyongyang were intent demonstrating what happens when KEDO's heavy fuel oil deliveries are not on schedule - there is no light or heat. We retreated to the dark, cold lobby coffee shop for something warm to drink. A cup of coffee cost DPRK Won 6.00, or US \$3.00, the same as in Tokyo. Tea was only fifty cents less.

Unlike my visits in 1995 and 1996, I had come to North Korea not as a member of the U.S. Spent Fuel Team but to review, together with Joel Wit, the full spectrum of issues related to the Agreed Framework's implementation. Accordingly, the host for this visit would be the Foreign

Ministry, not the Atomic Energy Bureau. Foreign Ministry North American Affairs officer Li Gun arrived at the hotel on time. He smiled his usual beaming smile, but it dropped from his face as soon as he sat down. With restrained emotion, Li said, "You returned ashes, not bodies. We expected the remains to be bodies. This was not good. We did not need this. It did not help. The consequences have not yet gone away." Li gun alleged the return of ashes instead of bodies would increase mistrust of South Korea and the United States. "You should have told us. Why didn't you tell us? You know our face is very important, but we, the Foreign Ministry, lost it in front of North Korea's military." Fortunately, neither Joel nor I had been on the U.S. team that had negotiated the understanding so we were able to plead our ignorance as to the reasons no advance notice had been given regarding the return of ashes.

Comment: Li gun's reference to the return of ashes was to the cremated remains of the North Korean crew and commandoes who died as a result of their submarine's grounding off the east coast of South Korea early in September 1996. The submarine's discovery unleashed a massive military campaign in South Korea to locate and capture or kill all who had been on this North Korean raid into South Korea. The government and people of South Korea were justifiably outraged and frightened by North Korea's provocative misdeed. Eventually, the South Korean military either killed the North Korean raiders or they were found to have been killed by their own officers or committed suicide. The United States intervened in the hope of calming the situation with an offer to broker a diplomatic resolution to the very dangerous situation. Several weeks of intense negotiation finally yielded an agreement. In exchange for North Korea's public apology to South Korea, an unprecedented act, and promise not to repeat such raids, South Korea would return the remains of the deceased North Korean military personnel. The return of the remains took place on December 29, 1996. To the dismay of the North Korean side, the remains consisted of ashes. **End comment.**

Li Gun, having completed his official business, shifted to his more congenial self. He exclaimed that someone had invited him to attend President Clinton's second inauguration in Washington, D.C. He asked us if we knew who had invited him, and how did they find out about him. Li's voice was filled with excitement and anticipation as he spoke. He asked for assistance in obtaining a visa, and I promised to send a fax to the Office of Korea Affairs that evening to request such assistance. Li then hosted us to a feast that included three kinds of liquor, crab salad, squid, potatoes and baby oysters, sausage, barbequed beef and rice. Despite the frigid cold in the unheated hotel, Li's hospitality, mixed with ample portions of Pyongyang vodka, soon made us forget the cold.

January 15, 1997 - Wednesday

I was up at 4:30 a.m. and promptly headed out the hotel's front door for my usual early morning stroll. The air was bitter cold, and the side walks covered with dirty black ice. The daily morning bell had rung, officially sounding the beginning of the day. Rush hour was well underway by 7:15 a.m. People walked quickly and silently past me. All were well protected against the cold, but their clothing was uncharacteristically dirty, which I assumed was a consequence of the lack of hot water to wash clothes. A crowd of soldiers waiting for a train puffed on cigarettes in front of Pyongyang Central Railroad Station beneath a huge portrait of a

somber looking Kim Il Sung. A few civilians lingered nearby. All carried back packs stuffed with food and bottles of beer. A few cars, including a recent model, four door Honda sedan, also waited in front of the station. Apparently the daily train from Beijing had been delayed. Across from the train station, a squad of about twelve armed soldiers took up positions at a bus stop. Never had I seen this before. Elsewhere, long lines of people formed to await either boarding a bus or an electric street tram. Shivering from the cold, I returned to the hotel for breakfast.

9:30 a.m. We departed for Nyongbyon. The road was covered all the way with snow and ice. Our driver obviously knew nothing of the potential consequences if he tried to stop quickly on the ice. We traveled via the fully paved Myohyang Expressway until after we had crossed the Chongchon River. All along our route, people could be seen carrying "compost" on their backs to the fields, or shoveling it from ox carts. Occasionally I spotted small piles of chemical fertilizer. Unlike previous years, the fields had not been plowed after the fall harvest. (Comment: This practice loosened the dirt and allowed the brisk winter breezes to blow away much of the top soil. UN agricultural advisers apparently had finally convinced the DPRK's Academy of Agricultural Sciences to order a halt to the practice. **End comment.**)

No tractors or trucks were to be seen anywhere. We left the relatively safe expressway for the still unpaved and narrow lane that served as the main road between Kyecheon south of the Chongchon River and the city of Nyongbyon north of the river. Beyond the city of Nyongbyon, we crossed the frozen Kuryong River. Seeing our destination on the horizon, the driver increased his speed despite the ice on the road. Just as he did so, our North Korean escort in the front seat noticed an ox cart to our front left. Just as he told the driver to be careful, the ox turned toward our car and we collided. Fortunately, both vehicles were on ice when they collided. The force of the collision knocked us in opposite directions, minimizing the force of the impact. The car suffered only minor damage. As for the ox, he appeared to have quickly recovered from a brief spell of dizziness and was last seen moving at a virtual gallop away from us. Again, the driver resumed his excessive speed, but this time, fortunately, nothing impeded our rush to the guest house.

January 16, 1997 - Wednesday

Our meeting with Atomic Energy Bureau Deputy Director General for External Affairs Hyon Man-song proved quite informative. He explained that since the Agreed Framework's signing in October, 1994, there had been six rounds of DPRK-IAEA talks. Monitoring activities at North Korea's "frozen" nuclear facilities topped the agenda of the first meeting. During more recent meetings, discussions have focused on alleged "unfair" IAEA activities. Hyon claimed the IAEA had ignored North Korea's "sincerity and cooperation," and was seeking "excessive" monitoring activities. North Korea halted its nuclear activities within one month of the accord's signing, Hyon recalled, and thereafter cooperated fully with the IAEA monitoring of its nuclear facilities. At that time, Hyon claimed, the "freeze of nuclear activities" meant: "no operations to be conducted at frozen facilities and no construction work at these or other places, and all these facilities were placed under IAEA seals." The freeze means, Hyon summarized, that the IAEA should monitor to ensure there are no activities and no construction per the Agreed Framework. The IAEA, therefore, should be satisfied, Hyon exclaimed, but it continues to claim it must install more monitoring devices (cameras and seals). Making measurements, Hyon continued, is an

inspection activity, not a monitoring activity and it is inconsistent with monitoring the freeze on nuclear facilities.

The second problem, Hyon added, is the IAEA's demand to complete implementation of the safeguards agreement which is premature. According to the results of the IAEA Board of Governors and their reports to the UN Security Council, we are regarded as being in compliance with our safeguards agreement