

## VOA Note #10

**Date:** May 29, 1993  
**PLACE:** John F. Kennedy Airport, New York City  
**Event:** DPRK Negotiating team arrives for first US-DPRK Negotiations  
**Present:** DPRK First Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and chief Negotiator Kang Sok-ju  
DPRK MFA Ambassador at Large for Nuclear Issues Kim Gye Kwan  
DPRK MFA North America Affairs Deputy Director Li Gun  
DPRK MFA International Affairs officer Li Yong-ho  
DPRK Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN Ho Jong  
DPRK Ambassador, UN Mission, Kim Su-man  
DPRK Interpreter

The North Korean delegation arrived at JFK airport just before the start of the Memorial Day weekend at the end of May 1993. A mobile lounge (similar to those used at Dulles International Airport) had been sent to plane side to pick up the eight North Koreans. I was waiting to greet the group at an isolated part of the main terminal. Standing on either side of me was an US Immigration officer and a US Customs officer, both armed with pistols which was standard procedure.

As soon as the lounge's door open, a startled Kang Sok-ju asked me in Korean, "Are we under arrest?" Equally surprised by his question, I answer, "No, why do you ask?" Kang pointed toward the guns and asked by I had come with armed guards to greet him. Also he explained that during previous visits to New York to attend the UN General Assembly, he had never been separated from the other passengers on the air plane. I explained that we were receiving him and his delegation as VIP's – very important persons – since they were the first DPRK diplomatic delegation to come to the USA for the purpose on engaging in negotiations with the US government. This pleased Kang. We then walked down a long corridor to a special area where immigration and customs procedures were quickly completed. Within 30 minutes of their arrival, the entire DPRK delegation had been admitted into the USA and clear through customs.

The delegation in indeed receive special treatment. Their baggage had previously been gathered into a specially designated luggage holder on the aircraft so that as soon as the flight landed at JFK, all the baggage was thoroughly x-rayed. Also each member of the DPRK delegation was photographed and copies made of their entry documents, including passport to provide the US government biographic information about each delegation member. Actually, the DPRK Mission in New York had already provided me all the information which I had relayed to the State Department. Other parts of the US government did not know this so had made their own special arrangements to collect the information. All they had had to do is ask the State Department and we would have shared the information with them.

As the delegation gathered outside after custom and immigration processing for their trip to Manhattan, Ambassador Ho Jong, DPRK Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN, offered me a ride in his huge black car. I paused briefly before answering,

recalling that I had been ordered not to ride with the North Koreans for fear that South Korean journalists might spot me and make an issue of it. I then accepted Ambassador's invitation. Kang Sok-ju got in the lead car with DPRK Ambassador to the UN Pak Gil-yon while I joined five DPRK diplomats in the second car. Ho Jong drove – he always preferred to drive and was a very safe driver.

On the trip to the Manhattan, at first we chatted casually exchanging personal information about our families and the trip from Pyongyang. Then one of the diplomats spotted the World Trade Center. Only a couple of months earlier terrorists had exploded a bomb in the building's basement causing terrible damage and injuring many. Excited, the North Korean pointed toward the twin towers and asked me, "Can we go to the top of the World Trade Center?" One of his colleagues cautioned in an abrupt tone, "No! Don't ask that. The Americans will think that we are terrorists planning an attack." Laughing, I told them of course they course go sightseeing in Manhattan. Another asked, "Can we go see a Broadway play and eat in a restaurant in Times Square?" "Yes," I answered explaining that it could be expensive. They assured me that they had saved money for their visit to New York. I gave them the name and telephone number of my hotel and offered to be of assistance during the weekend. Ambassador Ho dropped me off in front of the New York Helmsley Hotel on 42<sup>nd</sup> Street which became my temporary home during the forthcoming talks.

I spent the remainder of the weekend calming the nerves of security officials at the US Mission to the UN who worried that the North Koreans might get into trouble or try to defect to the US government. The North Koreans proved not be a problem. They conducted themselves like gentlemen, went sightseeing in Manhattan with the help of local Korean-Americans and stayed within the 25 miles limited imposed on all visiting North Koreans – a limit measure from Washington Square in downtown Manhattan that barred travel more than 25 miles from that point. Except for Kang Sok-ju, most of the delegation slept at the DPRK mission or in apartments of DPRK diplomats assigned to the mission.

South Koreans, on the other hand, bothered me constantly. The ROK embassy in Washington had assigned an officer to track me 24 hours a day and to call me for periodic reports. The South Korean media went crazy trying to find out what I was up to and where I was located. I am pleased to say that they never found me either at my hotel nor elsewhere. Most assumed that I would stay at the same hotel as Kang Sok-ju and thus they concentrated on him.

The weekend proved hectic finalizing arrangements and coordinating with numerous US government agencies beginning with the State Department. I also had to brief the US ambassador to the UN and his senior staff. I was greatly relieved when the talks began on June 1, 1993.

C. Kenneth Quinones  
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