

North Koreans Agree to Meet American MIA Families

By Rudi Williams
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WASHINGTON, May 8, 1997 -- North Koreans negotiating with DoD POW/MIA officials in New York have agreed to meet with family members of U.S. servicemen missing since the Korean War.

The unprecedented conclave with families will be held May 9 in New York City, where U.S. and North Korean negotiators are holding discussions. "We hope to sign an agreement by May 9 while the families are here," said Larry Greer, spokesman for POW/MIA Affairs Office.

"This is the first time family members will have an opportunity to meet with officials from North Korea to discuss accounting for their missing loved ones," Greer said. "The North Koreans agreed to meet privately with a small number of families to keep it on a personal basis. We invited 10 families from across the country."

In the past, families of missing Americans from the Korean and Vietnam wars have met with Russian officials of the U.S.-Russian Plenary Committee.

"The families had a lot of questions about Americans being transferred to Russia during the Korean and Vietnam wars," Greer said. "Family members have also traveled to Vietnam to discuss their missing loved ones with Vietnamese officials."

This fourth round of talks between the two countries resumed May 4, seeking an accord on joint operations to account for Americans missing since the Korean War. "The meeting here focuses on the 8,100 missing in action from the Korean War," Greer noted. He said the North Koreans are tough negotiators, but the talks are continuing on a positive note.

Discussions are focusing on three areas: investigations into reported sightings of alleged Americans living in North Korea, access to North Korean military archives and museums to recover data about Americans held as POWs during the war, and setting a schedule for resuming joint excavations to recover American remains buried in North Korean cemeteries and other sites.

"May 1996 was the last time we met with [the North Koreans]," Greer said. "Those talks ended with an agreement focused only on joint excavations. That July, we went into North Korea and recovered the remains of an American soldier -- Army Cpl. Lawrence J. LeBoeuf. His remains were later positively identified and returned to his family in Gretna, La., for burial."

In 1993 and 1994, North Korean officials returned 162 American servicemen's remains. Of those, six have been identified and returned to their families for burial.