

## U.S., North Korea Agree to Search for MIAs

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WASHINGTON, May 19, 1997 -- Pentagon officials reached an agreement May 14, with North Korea to search for remains of American troops missing since the Korean War.

The unexpected breakthrough came three days after formal negotiations in New York City ended May 10 without an agreement.

"The main stumbling block was that their delegation could not respond in a constructive way to our proposals in any of the three areas they'd agreed to discuss," said James W. Wold, deputy assistant secretary of defense for POW/MIA Affairs.

Wold said negotiations began May 4, focusing on the fullest possible accounting of American servicemen in three areas -- live sightings of alleged Americans living in North Korea, access to North Korean military archives, and setting a schedule for joint operations to recover American remains buried in North Korea.

"These negotiations were the fourth in a series of talks which began in January 1996," Wold said. "Like the earlier ones, they were confined to the single subject of the fullest possible accounting of MIAs."

After the talks ended unsuccessfully, Wold received a phone call from the North Korean U.N. mission in New York asking him to return to continue the talks. Wold refused, but agreed to deal via phone and fax machine.

Under the agreement, U.S. and North Korean teams will conduct three joint recovery operations this year for remains of missing American servicemen. U.S. researchers and North Korean teams will also search the Fatherland Liberation War Museum in Pyongyang, which houses artifacts and other materials from the Korean War, said Wold.

Both sides agreed human remains experts from the two countries would hold working-level contacts as soon as possible to implement the agreement.

Wold said DoD hopes to start joint recovery efforts as early as June and continue until the ground freezes in the fall. "There are more than 8,100 American servicemen missing in action from the Korean War," he noted. "We expect to find at least 3,500 of them, but until we get there, we really don't have a good feel for what those numbers might be."

The agreement calls for the Pentagon to pay North Korea \$105,500 for each of the two excavations, said Larry Greer, spokesman for the POW/MIA office. "Our agreement, just as it is with the Southeast Asian nations, reimburses the host nation for logistics expenses such as labor costs, food, water, travel, lodging, storage of our vehicles," Greer noted. "It also pays expenses for moving witnesses to and from investigation sites -- crash sites, individual graves, mass burial sites, or a mixture of those."

Wold's request for permission to interview American defectors in North Korea was denied. But the North Koreans agreed to continue discussions on that issue.

"Six Americans defected to North Korea in the '60s, '70s and '80s, and we believe four of them are still alive in North Korea," said Army Lt. Col. Martin Wisda, Korean War policy and plans adviser at DoD's POW/MIA Affairs Office. "We want to interview them to see if they can provide information about POWs they might have met from the Korean War era." He said the four defectors are believed to be alive because they've been seen in propaganda publications, magazines and films.

The defectors didn't go to North Korea during the war, Wisda emphasized. He said Army Spc. Jerry Wayne Parish defected in December 1963, Sgt. Charles Jenkins in January 1965, Pvt. Larry Allen Abshier in May 1962, Pfc. James Dreznock in August 1962, Pfc. Roy Chung in June 1979, and Pfc. Joseph T. White in August 1982.

After a round of POW/MIA talks with North Korean officials in New York City in May 1996, a joint operation returned the remains of one U.S. soldier to his family in July 1996.