

## U.S. POW/MIA Team Searches for Remains in North Korea

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American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, July 18, 1997 -- Ten U.S. POW/MIA specialists have begun joint recovery operations with North Korea to locate and repatriate remains of Americans missing in action since the 1950-1953 Korean War.

Larry Greer, spokesman for DoD's POW/MIA Affairs Office, said an eight-member field team from the Central Identification Laboratory, Hawaii, started digging July 18 at one of three sites to be investigated during the next 20 days. A two-person DoD and State Department liaison is in Pyongyang to handle communications during the field operation, he said.

The Americans include specialists in anthropology, explosive ordnance demolition and mortuary affairs. The lab in Hawaii receives remains for forensic identification.

Greer said the searchers set up a base camp July 15 in Unsan County, northwest North Korea. Unsan County is the site where hundreds of Americans were lost during fierce combat between U.S. and Chinese forces, Greer noted.

"Base camp is within walking distance of the excavation sites," he said. "The first thing they did was sweep the area for explosive ordnance, because the site is in the middle of a former battlefield. It's surrounded by farms.

"The North Koreans' cooperation is good," he said. "Team members said they feel the North Koreans' positive attitude is a carry-over of trust and cooperation established during the joint operation in July 1996."

Greer said the team is also on the lookout for any artifacts and other material that may lead to the identification and accounting of missing Americans -- a possible repository is the Fatherland Liberation War Museum in Pyongyang.

This is the first of three joint excavations scheduled for 1997 that were agreed to during talks in New York between Pentagon and North Korean negotiators in May. Under the agreement, U.S. researchers and North Korean teams will conduct joint recovery operations in July, August and October. Those months were selected because of severe weather conditions in North Korea in late fall and winter, Greer said.

In July 1996, a similar joint team located remains of an American soldier in Unsan County. The laboratory in Hawaii later identified the serviceman and returned his remains to his family for burial with full military honors.

About 8,100 Americans are still missing from the Korean War. Only seven of the 162 remains returned by the North Koreans in 1993-94 have been identified as missing U.S. servicemen.

"We don't expect to be able to account for all 8,100 missing Americans because some were lost over water and some were lost in areas where we have little, if any, information of the circumstances of their loss," Greer said. "Many graves around former POW camps were washed away by floods."

Greer said the U.S. team will not investigate recent reports of live sightings of American POWs or deserters in North Korea.

"The team's sole mission is to recover information, artifacts or remains leading to the identification of

missing American service members from the Korean War," Greer said. "The uncorroborated reports of live Americans are being investigated through other channels."

The United States will compensate North Korea for labor, witnesses, fuel, transportation, food for the Korean personnel, land compensation, standby helicopter medical evacuation support and other support, Greer noted.

He said DoD will not discuss specific information about remains or other items recovered.

"Our first commitment is to keeping our family members informed, and we're doing that," Greer said.