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U.S.-NORTH KOREA CONCLUDE POW/MIA TALKS

Talks between the United States and North Korea on issues related to accounting for MIA American soldiers ended yesterday in Bangkok.

Led by Jerry D. Jennings, deputy assistant secretary of defense for POW/Missing Personnel Affairs, the one-day session laid out the U.S. vision for improving U.S. remains recovery operations inside North Korea, as well as facilitating live sighting investigations.

Jennings, addressing Colonel General Li Chon Bok of the Korean People's Army, said "...our meeting gives each of us our first opportunity to provide an overarching vision for the direction in which we need to take the accounting issue in the future."

Jennings also spoke of past technical agreements, the result of which led to the recovery of the remains of more than 170 American soldiers over seven years. But he emphasized that progress is needed from the North Korean side to establish a mechanism for resolving reports of the possibility of Americans living or being held in North Korea.

He specifically called for access to American defectors living in North Korea, in an effort to shed some light on such reports.

Preserving the safety and security of Americans participating in recovery operations in North Korea is paramount, he added, and that safeguards at the sites must preserve their scientific integrity. He proposed that remains recovery operations be expanded in frequency, beyond the locations where they have been conducted in the past.

He called for follow-up technical negotiations to be held in December in Bangkok. The North Koreans agreed to continue a dialogue.

Teams of specialists from the U.S. Army Central Identification Laboratory Hawaii will complete the third of three operations in North Korea at the end of this month in Unsan county 60 miles north of Pyongyang, as well as near the Chosin Reservoir in the northeast part of the country. Similar U.S. teams have conducted 24 operations in the seven years since 1996.