



Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office

Major Remains Concentrations in North Korea

Background: Among losses on the ground, most men died in major battles or as prisoners of war (POW) in permanent or recurrently used camps. Others died along the wayside or in small villages, and air losses occurred all over North Korea. But many of the air losses also occurred in proximity to battle zones or the roads connecting them. So it is possible to speak of major concentrations of human remains. Of more than 7,950 men lost and unrecovered from the Korean War, about 5,500 were lost in North Korea, and most of these men were part of well defined, geographical populations.

POW Camps: The Apex Camps operated by the North Koreans hold more than 300 remains, and peninsular Camp 5 on the south bank of the Yalu River, another 550. The main Death Valley Camp, also known as Pukchin-Tarigol, adds 350. In common, most of the men who died at these sites passed during the Winter of 1950-51, before food could be delivered reliably and shelter was haphazard at best. By the next winter, conditions were far better and deaths were far fewer. There were many other POW deaths as well, but these were along the wayside or in smaller villages, of which Valley #1 Camp is an example. The villages of the Suan Camps contain another 225 from several recurrent movements, nearly all being exhausted men who could go no farther north in their marches.

Battle zones: The combined Unsan and Chongchon River battle area contains approximately 1,600 dead, including concentrations along the Kuryong River, and at Unsan, Kunu-ri, and Kujang. Our recovery teams have worked at several sites within this general area. Farther east, in the Chosin Reservoir campaign, almost 1,200 men are still unaccounted-for. Most of these were at sites along the east side of the Reservoir, but there were also substantial losses at Yudam-ni and along the road south from the Reservoir to Hungnam.

United Nations Military Cemeteries (UNMCs): U.S. and U.N. forces buried many of their own battlefield dead in temporary cemeteries at several locations across North Korea. As allied forces withdrew, these sites were abandoned to advancing Chinese forces. Following the war, many human remains were turned over by the Chinese and North Koreans during Operation Glory (details below). Some of the cemeteries were completely evacuated. But these turnovers were incomplete, and we still hope to gather additional human remains from sites of the UNMCs at Pyongyang, Hungnam, and Koto-ri, as well as many isolated burials whose locations are known to us.

Operation Glory (and other returns): As required by the Armistice, both sides made an effort to return war dead during September through November of 1954. The Chinese and North Koreans provided a total of 4,167 containers, with an estimated 4,219 human remains, of whom 2,944 are known or believed to be Americans. Generalizing, the figures presented in the slide are “net,” after identifications from these returns have been deducted. This is also true of unilateral remains turnovers by the North Koreans in 1990-94 and in 2007, and our own recovery work in North Korea from 1996-2005.

Demilitarized Zone (DMZ): The present DMZ separates North and South Korea. It is 4,000 meters wide, with half in North Korea and half in South Korea. The center line, the de facto international border, is known as the Military Demarcation Line (MDL). Just over 1,000 men are unrecovered from the generalized DMZ area and nearby buffer zones. The “89” cited in the associated map are specific losses, which U.S. Army Graves Registration Services believed in 1954 could still be recovered.