



# Duty on the LAST COMMUNIST FRONTIER

Story and Photos by Heike Hasenauer

**K**OREA — largely forgotten as the world focuses its attention on war-on-terror fronts — became the center of attention in October, when underground seismic activity suggested that communist North Korea had tested a nuclear weapon.

Earlier, in July 2006, North Korea was at center stage after it launched seven missiles, including a long-range Taepodong-2 that could have reached the United States had it not failed shortly after takeoff, Defense Department officials reported.

## Best Place to Be

Despite the inherent dangers of living virtually at the doorstep of a communist-ruled society that boasts the fourth largest army in the world and being within range of several thousand North Korean artillery tubes [*see related story, "The Divided Korea"*] — an assignment to South Korea, officially

■ (Main photo) Patriot crewman PFC Brian Overstreet inspects a launcher near Osan. (Inset) A Soldier of the Camp Humphreys-based 2nd Combat Aviation Brigade prepares an AH-64 Apache for a mission.

■ Eighth U.S. Army commander LTG David P. Valcourt said U.S. military personnel in Korea will soon be witnessing significant changes.

the Republic of Korea, or ROK, “is the assignment of greatest stability right now,” said Eighth U.S. Army commander LTG David P. Valcourt.

That’s because the majority of “Soldiers who arrive here aren’t preparing to deploy to Iraq or Afghanistan, nor have they just come from those places,” Valcourt said. When they arrive in the ROK, they are deployed to a real-life contingency operation, where officials take the possibility of war seriously every day.



While world attention is focused on Iraq and Afghanistan, Soldiers continue to guard freedom’s frontier in the Republic of Korea.

Because of the dangers, “Soldiers here can expect programs to support them,” Valcourt said. Among those is an equitable cost-of-living allowance, an assignment-incentive program that pays a Soldier who extends his tour in Korea up to \$400 extra per month, and a command “that bends over backward to take care of families.”

In 2006 Eighth Army reported it retained 3,009 Soldiers during fiscal year 2006, and 14,025 Soldiers through the AIP since 2003, what command officials describe as “a remarkable success story resulting in reduced personnel turbulence, improved readiness and decreased PCS costs.”

## Continuing Changes

U.S. military personnel in Korea will soon witness great change, said Valcourt. Between now and 2008 they’ll relocate farther south from the Yongsan Garrison in Seoul to Camp Humphreys, near Pyongtaek, and other areas.

Some 19 U.S. camps in South Korea have closed since 2003, said MAJ Tanya Bradsher, an Eighth Army spokeswoman. By 2008 some 70 camps will have closed, leaving 10 camps at two major location hubs. In



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total, some 36,000 acres of land will be returned to the ROK government.

The changes are part of the 2004 Yongsan Relocation Plan, an agreement between U.S. and ROK officials to move all U.S. forces out of the Seoul area and south of the Han River by December 2008. A reduction in force will have reduced the size of U.S. forces in Korea in 2008 by 12,500 — from 37,000 in 2004 to about 25,000 — said EUSA spokesman MAJ Jerome Pionk.

In 2006 the predominantly U.S. responsibility for the security of the Joint Security Area on the demilitarized zone, or DMZ, between North and South Korea was transferred

▶ This recently opened 8-story apartment building at Camp Humphreys accommodates 48 families and is the first of a projected three-building, \$40.7 million complex.

▶ Realistic training is a constant for U.S. units in Korea. Here, members of the 1st Battalion, 43rd Air Defense Artillery Regiment, undergo convoy-operations training near Camp Casey.

to the ROK army. The current JSA security battalion is composed of 98 percent ROK soldiers commanded by a U.S. officer. [See related story on the DMZ.]

### Moving South

It will be to the U.S. forces' advantage to move south, officials say, since the only remaining communist stronghold in the world also has the most heavily armed border in the world, and it lies about 25 miles north of Seoul, the current home of many of the 25,000 U.S. service members stationed in the ROK.

“Moving will also allow us to create efficiencies, by significantly reducing the number of commissaries and other support facilities,” said Valcourt.

Some \$8 billion — twice the amount of money and materiel going into force structure at Fort Bliss, Texas, to accommodate troops being relocated to the United States from other parts of the world — is going into Camp Humphreys. The cost will be borne jointly by the United States





▲ The Armed Forces Recreation Center's Dragon Hill Lodge in Yongsan is one of many current U.S. military facilities scheduled for turnover to the South Korean government.

and the ROK over the next five years, said Valcourt.

### Enhancing Stay-Put Facilities

LTC John Chavez, commander of 1st Battalion, 43rd Air Defense Artillery Regiment, 35th ADA Brigade, at Osan Air Base, is already looking forward to a much larger convoy live-fire course that will be available to his Soldiers through the transformation of U.S. forces in Korea.

Located at Story Range, not in the south, but north near Camp Casey — where several 2nd Inf. Div. outlying camps have already been consolidated into Camp Casey — it's

part of a larger U.S.-ROK program to enhance the U.S. facilities that will not be relocated, said Pionk.

Because the role of some 8,000 2nd Inf. Div. Soldiers is largely to guard the demilitarized zone with its ROK counterparts, the division will not move south, and Warrior Base, the support area at the training range, is going to be built up to accommodate a battalion-size training rotation, Chavez said.

“By next summer, we'll have a much larger convoy live-fire course, which will allow Soldiers to fire from both sides of the road,” Chavez said. They'll also be able to train on a hand-

grenade range, claymore-mine range and others.

Recently, Battery E, 43rd ADA Regt., from Camp Casey, underwent convoy-operations training. Artillery simulators, smoke, and mock improvised explosive devices created realism on the range as the convoy rolled through. The Soldiers reacted to various notional events, including an ambush, and were required to breach obstacles and fire on designated targets.

Meanwhile, a Patriot missile crew of the 1st Bn., 43rd ADA, underwent a drill to determine its readiness to launch missiles should the need ever



 Soldiers of the 1st Bn., 43rd ADA, practice target engagement techniques at Story Range near Camp Casey.

arise to protect vital air assets at Osan Air Base.

Indeed, training on the Korean peninsula is constant and intense, said Valcourt. “We continue to plan, coordinate and participate in two annually conducted joint/combined exercises with ROK forces to sustain peak readiness standards for our deterrence mission.”

The 3,000-member 2nd Combat Aviation Brigade, which normally moves troops and supplies, would be largely responsible for using its additional two battalions of UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters and CH-47 Chinooks to evacuate noncombatants, said MAJ David Law, assistant brigade operations officer.

Because of the close proximity to

North Korea, and the potential danger associated with accidentally crossing into communist-run territory, pilots must undergo 25 to 30 hours of special instruction to fly near the DMZ. And pilots new to Korea always fly with a flight instructor first to become familiar with authorized routes, Law said. Besides the potential danger of wandering into enemy territory, Korea’s mountainous terrain and smog-restricted visibility creates other challenges, pilots said.

### Enjoying the Country

While Soldiers in units like the 2nd Inf. Div., 11th ADA Bde. and 2nd CAB train hard and regularly to ensure they’re ready to go to war, U.S. commanders in the ROK encourage their troops to take advantage of local cultural programs to gain an appreciation and awareness of their host nation and its 5,000-year history.

The joint U.S.-ROK armies’ Good Neighbor Program encourages U.S.-

 Radio broadcaster SPC Kimutaya Lambirth is one of many American Forces Network-Korea Soldiers helping entertain and inform military personnel.



## The Divided Peninsula

**T**HE demilitarized zone, or DMZ, between North and South Korea extends 1.25 miles on either side of the 151-mile-long Military Demarcation Line.

The Korean peninsula was divided into communist North Korea and democratic South Korea in 1945. And technically, the two Koreas are still at war, since the 1950 to 1953 Korean War ended with an armistice, not a peace treaty.

Today, differences in the two countries are said to be as apparent as differences were between eastern and western Europe before European unification. While South Korea is a vibrant, modern nation, most visitors to North Korea describe it as dark, gloomy, unadorned, and without color or vitality.

Aid agencies have estimated that some two million people have died in North Korea since the mid-1990s because of severe food shortages, and the country relies on foreign aid to feed millions of its people. They say, too, that the north has an estimated 200,000

political prisoners.

The totalitarian state has been accused of such human-rights abuses as torture, public executions and forced abortions, according to U.S. State Department reports. It suffers a dilapidated economy, but boasts one of the world's largest standing armies. President George W. Bush called North Korea part of an "axis of evil," after the country reactivated a nuclear reactor and banned international weapons inspectors several years ago.

It's no wonder that the ROK — an area roughly the size of Indiana and inhabited by some 48 million people — is among the most dangerous places in the world; it's the only place where American Soldiers still face an armed communist threat.

U.S. and ROK troops who are part of the United Nations Command's Joint Security Area are right on the border, and Soldiers stationed at the northernmost of the Army's installations, Camp Casey, are only about 10 miles south of the border with North Korea. — Heike Hasenauer



Korean friendship and understanding through community relations-civil affairs efforts that reach millions of military personnel and civilians annually, Valcourt said.

"Being stationed in Yongsan," the U.S. military district of Seoul, "is like living in any big city," said CPT Stacy Ouellette, an Eighth Army public affairs officer, who's been in Korea since June 2004.

"One of the greatest things about being assigned here is the opportunity to explore a foreign land. There's so much to do and see here," said Ouellette, who has embraced the Korean culture and eagerly shares her knowledge of her hosts' customs and traditions.

Ouellette knows her way around Seoul by car and subway, and can direct visitors to such notable attractions as

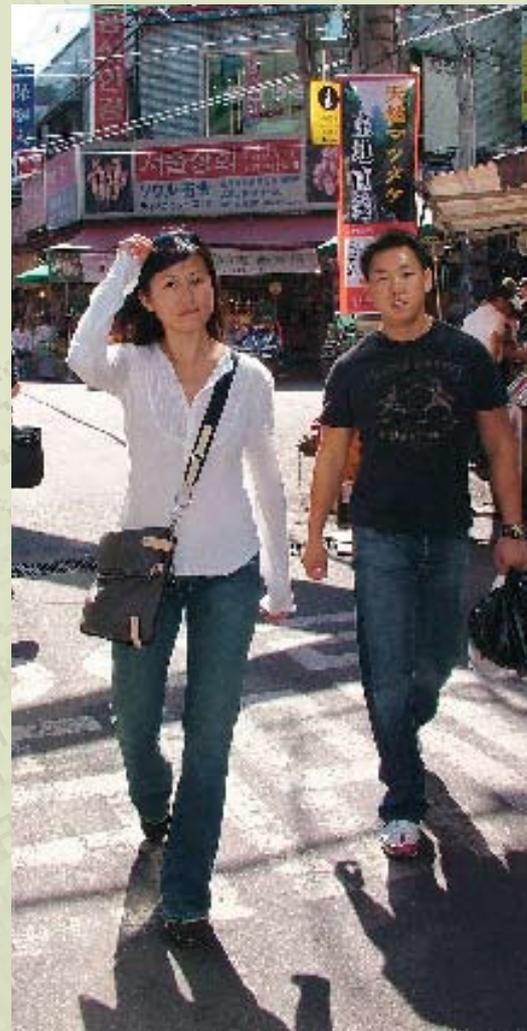
Nam Dae Mun, a traditional Korean marketplace; the Seoul Sungnyemun, the ancient main gate of Seoul's fortress wall; and Seoul tower.

And she can maneuver her way through the frenzied activity of Seoul, where throngs of shoppers swarm the famed Itaewon district, with its mind-boggling array of shops, restaurants and street-side vendors, or the more

▶ Korea's fast-growing and vibrant economy allows the nation's citizens to enjoy a high standard of living, especially in Seoul and the other large cities.



▶ Duty in South Korea offers American service members the chance to intimately experience the country's culture, history and food, including octopus and many other local delicacies.





“... we want to enhance the quality of life for our service members, civilians and families...”

upscale Insadong district, where visitors scour antique shops for treasures or stop to buy such local delicacies as ginseng-flavored taffy and dried octopus.

“The hardest part about being in Korea is being away from family. Also, the time difference between here and my home in Boston makes calling home whenever I want to more difficult,” Ouellette said.

Eighth U.S. Army comprises about 80 percent of the force within U.S. Forces, Korea, said Eighth Army CSM Barry Wheeler.

For most of these Soldiers, a tour in Korea is still consid-

ered a “hardship tour,” he said, “not because of the location, but because most people don’t get to bring their families with them. Ninety-five percent of the time, Soldiers come here on a one-year, unaccompanied tour.”

▲ A Korean woman (at right) and her American friend model traditional Korean kimonos. Americans say cross-cultural friendships are one of the best aspects of serving in South Korea.

### Plans for the Future

Valcourt and USFK commander GEN B.B. Bell want to make a tour in Korea more like a tour in Europe, Wheeler said. “It’s hard to deliver the quality of life you want to deliver with so many camps. That’s the overarching theme — consolidation. The plan is to consolidate into four hubs south of the Han River.

“At the same time, we want to enhance the quality of life for our service members, civilians and family members by providing more accompanied tours,” he said.

In any event, the United States is committed to helping the ROK army defend South Korea, Wheeler said. That will not change. 🇺🇸



## Augmenting the Force

**A**BOUT 2,800 KATUSAs — Korean Augmentees to the U.S. Army — complement U.S. Soldiers in Korea on virtually every installation, and in every support role, said Eighth U.S. Army spokesman MAJ Jerome Pionk.

The Korean soldiers, who would otherwise serve a two-year mandatory tour of duty in the Republic of Korea army, serve a two-year tour with U.S. forces in Korea. They train, work and live with the American Soldiers, wear U.S. uniforms, and share meals and barracks with their American counterparts.

Paid by their own government, the KATUSAs progress up the ranks quickly, typically becoming sergeants within two years, Pionk said.

However, unlike U.S. sergeants, they earn roughly \$80 per month. While the pay is much less than what U.S. Soldiers receive, being able to live and work closely with U.S. Soldiers has much more than made up for the difference, said SGT Jiyong Park, a

KATUSA who works for EUSA as a driver, ferrying visitors throughout the South Korean portion of the peninsula.

“In the U.S. Army, I get to choose what I want to eat,” said Park.

Besides affording him the opportunity to take driver’s training, being a KATUSA has helped Park improve his English skills and has cemented friendships that will last a lifetime, he said.

**▶** A vital part of U.S. operations, KATUSAs are paid by their own government but wear U.S. uniforms and share Soldiers’ duties, meals and barracks.



**▶** KATUSAs spend two-year tours with U.S. forces, and receive the same training as their U.S. counterparts.

By the same token, “we learn a lot from the KATUSAs,” said EUSA spokeswoman CPT Stacy Ouellette. They not only supplement the U.S. military work force, KATUSAs introduce younger Soldiers, who might otherwise be prone to stay on the U.S. installations, to the area, the food and Korea’s rich heritage and customs, she said.

Like Park, most KATUSAs are selected for the program at age 19 or 20, after a year of college. ROK Army officials select candidates based on aptitude and English skills.

Once in the program, “KATUSAs undergo all the same training as their U.S. Army counterparts,” said Pionk.

“And the smart U.S. NCOs at Eighth Army learn fast that they can’t get things done as quickly or efficiently without their KATUSAs, who know their way around the country, and can help translate and make important introductions,” Pionk said.

When Park completes the program this spring he plans to return to college in Seoul to complete a degree in architecture. — Heike Hasenauer

