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Korea – Half a Century of Armed Conflict With No Recognition

United States Armed Service members deployed to the Republic of Korea (R.O.K.), standing vigil on "Freedom's Frontier", are not recognized with a campaign or service medal. This is the only deployment directly facing an enemy or other hazardous situation not recognized with some type of service award. It is the longest containment assignment in military history. Under current regulations the Korean Service Medal awarded between June 25, 1950 and July 27, 1954, is the appropriate recognition and should be awarded. A Date Scroll Device is proposed to be affixed for post 27 July 1954. A U.N. service medal is also earned and deserved for this service, but is not awarded. The U.S. presence in Korea still serves under the United Nations Command headed by the United States. The UN Flag still flies. The UN Korea Service Medal (UNKSM), awarded during the same time as the KSM, is the deserved award for this deployment and should be authorized. The only recognition currently received for Korea service is the Overseas Service Ribbon which is the same decoration that personnel stationed in non-combat or non-conflict overseas areas receive. Even this ribbon eligibility only covers the period from August 1, 1981 to the Present with the following exception. The ribbon may be awarded retroactively to personnel who were credited with a Korea tour completion before August 1, 1981, provided they had an Active Army status on or after August 1, 1981. Those stationed in Korea prior to August 1981 without post August 1, 1981 service are not even entitled to this token award. This ribbon, however, is highly inappropriate for this documented historically dangerous deployment.

Service members that have been engaged in direct hostile actions with enemy forces are also not recognized with Combat Infantry and Combat Medic Badges, Combat Patches, Combat Action Ribbons or Hazardous Duty Pay with the exception of the period October 1, 1966 to June 30, 1974 when the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal (AFEM) was awarded. A double-standard exists with regard to combat awards for Korea versus other regions involved in hostile actions. To qualify for combat recognition, a soldier must serve in the hostile zone for 60 days, engage the enemy in 5 firefights during this 60 day period, and have previously had "hostile fire pay" authorized, and he must be recommended personally by each commander in the chain of command and approved at division level (AR 600-22-8.6.H). This is very different from the regulations for the same award in other regions. The Korea regulations are written to almost preclude service members from being able to qualify. [A combat zone is where and when the enemy chooses to kill you. An enemy bullet fired during a containment operation kills just as dead as a bullet during the open conflict. An enemy bullet fired in Korea kills just as dead as a bullet fired in El Salvador. An exchange of gunfire with enemy forces is combat regardless of how you choose to define combat in your regulations.](#) To compensate for the lack of recognition given to soldiers by the Pentagon, the 2nd and 7th Infantry Divisions created awards of their own. The 7th Division issued the "Infantryman's Badge" and the 2nd Division issued the "Imjin Scout Badge". A soldier would qualify for the Imjin Scout Badge with 30 continuous days inside the DMZ or 90 days total non-consecutive, and after completing 25 combat and recon patrols. Engagement in a firefight authorized an automatic award with no number of days requirements. This followed the same requirements for the CIB in a combat theater under normal circumstances. A certificate was issued with the badge (both cloth and metal varieties) and was much coveted by the recipients. These badges (honors) were later disallowed by regulations.

[U.S. Armed Forces members stationed in Korea are not a garrison force with a mission of training and readiness. They are stationed in one of the two remaining combat zones \(Korea and Persian Gulf\) after Vietnam was removed from the list in 1996. A state-of-war continues to exist on the Korean Peninsula. The Korean border is the most heavily armed border in the world. These](#)

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troops are operating as a containment force during the extended "Cease-fire Campaign Operation" of the Post Conflict phase. They stand the line against the fifth largest Army in the world with 1.2 million active military troops and an additional 5 million reserve forces. They face an Army with 65% of its forces forward deployed, poised in a threatening and offensive stance, within 100 kilometers of the DMZ. Prior to October 4, 1991, the 1st Marine Division and the U.S. Army's 24th Infantry, 7th Infantry, 1st Cavalry, and 2nd Infantry Divisions patrolled the dangerous northwest corridor of the demilitarized zone (DMZ) separating the two Koreas. They manned the U.N. DMZ guard posts, maintained aerial and water surveillance, and ensured security at the Joint Security Area (JSA). The mission continues, however, today it is solely JSA soldiers performing this duty. These forces remain at a constant state of readiness, are frequently on alert status, outfitted in combat gear and they carry loaded weapons, ammo and necessary communications devices. The U.S. Army's 1st Battalion, 506th Infantry (AASLT) is currently stationed in the northwest sector less than 2 kilometers from the DMZ, and the U.S. Army 2nd Infantry Division is stationed with units forward deployed on the convergence of the two main invasion routes into South Korea. As noted by the Secretary of Defense and others, the Korean Peninsula is one of the two most dangerous flash points in the world today. As recently as May 2000, the U.S. State Department decided to "keep" North Korea on the list of terrorist countries.

Imminent danger, in its most strict definition, exists in Korea today as it has for 46 years. This is not new news. Since the signing of the 1953 Armistice Agreement there have been over 40,479 violations by the Korean Peoples Armed Forces (North Korea). These have occurred in the DMZ by infiltrators, the coastlines south of the DMZ, small islands around the mainland as well as in the Capitol of Seoul itself. Many of them very serious acts of war and very recent. [These breaches to the cease-fire agreement began as early as 1955 with shoot-downs on two occasions of Army Recon planes over the DMZ and the deaths of 3 Americans.](#) A dog fight in the Yellow Sea off the Korea coastline occurred the same year with Chinese MIGs attacking a U.S. RB-45 and 2 MIGs shot down by escorting U.S. F-86 fighters. To date there have been 1,239 U.S. KIAs (hostile fire or landmines from KPA), 224 U.S. WIAs (hostile fire from KPA), at least 87 captured and held POW (some for as long as a 1 year), plus more than 2,300 R.O.K. casualties. This count is the officially recorded actual combat deaths since the signing of the Armistice Agreement and does not count fratricide, accidents, and other non-battle injuries or deaths. Adding the number of U.S. plus R.O.K. casualties and dividing by the 46 years of containment, you find an average of [76.9 casualties per year](#). If one divides the 40,479 recorded incidents by the total number of months, 552, there are an average of [73.33 breaches to the cease-fire every month](#). These are very high counts. There have been ground ambushes, aerial shoot-downs, naval actions, acts of sabotage, and assassination attempts. [Had these incidents occurred in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Sinai, Bosnia, Kosovo or elsewhere, national media coverage would be considerable and medals would be awarded with ceremony. This lack of respect and recognition given to service members serving on the Korean peninsula is without precedent, and shameful.](#)

If you want to know how service members feel about the hazards of this deployment and the lack of recognition, just ask! Ask the surviving crew member of the US Army helicopter shot down in 1994 over North Korea who watched as his fellow crewmember was killed, and he then became a POW. Or ask the AH-64 pilots and ground crew members deployed with Special Forces Detachment-Korea who, along with 400,000 personnel from the R.O.K. Army, were deployed on a massive manhunt in 1996 for KPA commandos from a grounded infiltration submarine. This operation resulted in 24 North Koreans KIA and 1 captured, 13 South Korean KIAs, and dusk to dawn curfews for 53 days. [All this took place 60 miles south of the DMZ.](#) The weapons and ammunition the KPA had on the sub included 4000 items of 327 different kinds of combat gear. This was not a spy pickup or delivery but a commando raid/assassination attempt as evidenced by a PRC Type 63 Multiple Rocket Launcher (Mountain Model) that weighs in at 618 lbs. and is designed to be taken apart and transported in a manpack configuration. Also included were AK-47 rifles, U.S. style Battle Dress uniforms and U.S. M16 rifles with serial numbers removed. Ask the members of the South Korean Navy who fought an intense Naval Battle in the Yellow Sea with North Korean Navy vessels damaging 2, sinking 1, and killing over 30 sailors. This major battle took place less than a year ago in 1999. Ask any member of the armed forces in Korea how

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they feel about the North Korean long and short range missile capability, or the potential for biological, chemical or nuclear warfare. These incidents and violent hostile actions by North Korean Forces are not isolated incidents, but deliberate, calculated, aggressive actions to intimidate the military, polarize U.S.-R.O.K. relations, force UN and U.S. support to desist, and ultimately cause the North to regain control over the entire peninsula under communist control. The following are statements by U.S. officials exemplifying the dangers of this deployment:

Listen to what our own leaders say about the threat from North Korea:

William S. Cohen, Secretary of Defense: ["Korea is perhaps the hottest flash point in the world. As long as tensions remain high, we have to have a strong deterrent."](#) (DoD Web site, 10/21/99).

Lt. Gen. Patrick M. Hughes, Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency: ["It is likely North Korea has a limited nuclear capability and the capability to engage in chemical warfare. North Korea and Iraq are our most likely opponents in a major theater conflict."](#) (World's "turmoil" is long-term problem, [Army Times](#), George C. Wilson, Pg. 30, February 23, 1998)

Gen. John Tilelli, Commander of the Combined Forces Command and Commander in chief of United Nations Command until December 1999: ["The threat from the North hasn't diminished over time. North Korea has made steady progress in its surface-to-air missile capability, and existing SCUD missiles allow North Korea to target all of South Korea."](#) (DoD Web site, 10/21/99)

Lt. Col. Douglas J. Morrison, 3rd Squadron, 7th Cavalry, Fort Stewart, GA: ["Command Post \(December\) failed to mention two critical duty stations in the world, Korea and Kuwait are operational theaters focused on containment of a real, viable enemy. This is unlike the peacekeeping operations in the Balkans."](#) (February 2000, [VFW Magazine](#))

The late, Lt. Col. Louis J. Anjier, Jr: ["It has always been an anomaly that the three dead of A Troop, 1st Recon Squadron, 9th Cavalry, had been eligible for the Purple Heart, but no other award. And those who served beside, before, and after in the DMZ until 1966, were recognized with nothing for their exposure to North Korean and Communist Chinese actions"](#) (Firefights – Blaze on the DMZ, [VFW Magazine](#), Pg. 35, August 1996)

Ronald Reagan, President, 1984: ["We know about the danger. You're facing a heavily armed, unpredictable enemy with no regard for human life."](#)

Very few service members are aware that the R.O.K. government created and offered a medal for all who served in their defense after 1953. This service medal was turned down by the Pentagon. This is the same action taken by our government regarding the R.O.K. War Service medal offered to our Forces in 1951. First turn it down, then deny any knowledge of it, next make an excuse, and finally, 49 years later accept and authorize it. In 1994 or 1995, the 1/503 was awarded the R.O.K. Presidential Unit Citation (ROKPUIC) but the U.S. higher command would not allowed its acceptance. The 2nd Infantry Division was awarded this same ROKPUIC in December 1999 and it has been disapproved. Also, very few service members are aware that Australia, Canada, and New Zealand continued to award a service medal until their last units returned home from Korea. New Zealand actually created a separate medal with eligibility from 1954 to 1957, the latter date when their ground forces returned home. Canada still awards their Special Services Medal today.

The Joint Chiefs (JCS) have awarded the AFEM at least 33 times since its inception on December 4, 1961. Imminent danger is a requirement for the AFEM. Of those 33 occasions, 22 were awarded even though there were no hostile fire casualties for those operations (66.66% without hostile fire casualties). Of the 11 times the AFEM has been awarded with casualties, 9 of these times the number of casualties has been less than suffered in Korea. The number of KIAs inflicted by the North Koreans on US personnel in Korea since the signing of the Armistice is

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greater than the KIAs from Lebanon (1958), Grenada, Panama, Dominican Republic, Sinai, Haiti, and Somalia combined! Read the regulations and it is evident that Korea meets and exceeds any imminent danger criteria. In spite of its history of hostilities, there is no service award for Korea.

We mention the awarding of the AFEM to illustrate that awards are authorized for service when a threat, or perceived threat, is deemed imminent by the JCS. Although the threats are not always realized, the award is upheld. These awards are also authorized for supporting units even when they are not located where the hostilities are occurring. These awards have been authorized retroactively on several occasions. [With the constant threat from North Korea, its past history of armistice violations, its current incursions, and its tough talk regarding its position on reunification, the JCS sees no imminent danger in Korea. With its status as a rogue nation, a terrorist nation, potentially second hottest flash point in the world today, and one of the two most likely opponents of a major theater conflict, the JCS does not consider Korea service deserving service medal recognition.](#) In 1994 the U.S. Ambassador to Korea, James Laney, evacuated his family as tensions were very high and military strike plans were in motion. This information was released in a May 2000 issue of the [Korea Herald](#). To further emphasize the dangers encountered by our troops, late 1999 gas masks were issued to civilians and family members.

Korea deployment does not need to have a medal created for service, and the AFEM is inappropriate because of its peacekeeping orientation. The appropriate medals for Korea service are the KSMw/D and the UNKSM. Our armed services are involved in an incredible extension of the phase of war referred to as post-conflict activities (FM 100-5). These activities are Cease-fire Campaign Operations and the operational environment has changed back and forth from limited war to post-conflict operations many times. This is all strictly from the book. To illustrate this point, the Southwest Asia cease-fire is listed as a "Campaign" in AR 600-8-22. Our military recognizes that cease-fire operations are inherently dangerous enough to award a separate bronze service star for the Southwest Asia Service Medal (SWAM). Many units were awarded campaign participation credit for the Southwest Asia Cease-fire during Desert Storm and it was awarded for years after the Gulf War. When eligibility for the SWAM was closed, troops in Kuwait were authorized the AFEM for their service. Korea deployment is no different than the current Kuwait containment operation. Korea deployment has earned and deserves cease-fire campaign operations service medals. This constant lack of reward for service in defense of the R.O.K. begins to be suspect as the neglect continues while evidence clearly states the contrary.

This lack of Respect and Recognition for service in Korea is a mistake, more so in times of hard recruiting and tough retention environments. The current low retention and recruitment demonstrates this. This lack of visible recognition for service and sacrifice in Korea has a direct impact on service members' careers. Service members are competing with other service members who are being properly recognized for their service in places like Bosnia, Kuwait, and Kosovo. [Today's service members have no incentive to volunteer for Korea deployment because of the double standard in the award system. This is evidenced by the bonus incentives offered for re-enlistments to Korea. Former armed services members stationed in Korea, unlike their fathers and grandfathers, no longer encourage their children, grandchildren and others to choose the military as a career. Their loyalty to the services has diminished as a result of this unfair and neglectful treatment by their government.](#) Reward the Korea deployed as you do the Kuwait and Bosnia deployed and special bonus incentives will not be required. Bestow the service awards earned and deserved by former military members for Korea assignments, namely the KSMw/D and the UNKSM, and the once proud and loyal will again put the nation and its military services above all else.

It is time for a Pentagon policy change. It is time to give Korea deployment its proper respect and recognition after 46 plus years of defending freedom and democracy on "Freedom's Frontier". It is time to call Korea service what it really is, a tripwire defense between two warring nations, upholding a shattered armistice agreement, courageously and with dedication containing a hostile enemy under imminent danger. It is time to right a wrong and give the respect, recognition, and prestige earned and deserved by former and current armed forces members

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deployed to Korea. Let us not forget, the 1950 – 1953 forces returned South Korea's freedom and restored a fragile peace, but those deployed after July 27, 1954 have allowed these freedoms to continue under a democracy that has produced economic growth and prosperity while ensuring peace. These service members deserve better treatment. Award the KSMw/D, the UNKSM, and Combat Recognition where eligible.

It is strongly urged that all former and current armed forces members who have served or are serving in the R.O.K. visit the Korea Defense Veterans Alliance website at <http://home.att.net/~kdrcc/index.htm> and join a growing National organization fighting for the respect and recognition earned and deserved for Korea service.

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