



IN MY OPINION

By Irene Mandra

I thought you would be interested in the latest news:

19. U.S., North Korea discuss repatriation of remains
Washington Post, July 16, Pg. A9 | Adam Taylor
SEOUL -- U.S. military officials met with their North Korean counterparts Sunday to discuss the repatriation of the remains of soldiers left after the Korean War ended in 1953. U.S. officials said the meeting at the peninsula's demilitarized zone was "productive." Although several details about the transfer of the remains still had to be worked out, there was some agreement about how an initial transfer of remains would proceed, said a U.S. official, who was not authorized to speak about the meeting publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

Sunday's talks came three days after North Korean officials failed to attend a scheduled meeting about the remains, leaving their U.S. counterparts waiting at the demilitarized zone's Joint Security Area. The State Department later said the North Korean side had been in contact at midday to cancel that meeting Thursday and had suggested rescheduling to Sunday. Yonhap News reported that three U.S. Forces Korea vehicles were seen driving over the Tongil Bridge and entering the DMZ about 8:20 a.m. The U.S. delegation was led by Maj. Gen. Michael A. Minihan, chief of staff for the U.N. Command, and North Korea's side included a two-star general, the South Korean news agency reported, citing diplomatic sources. The multinational but U.S.-led U.N. Command was formed during the Korean War and now helps maintain the armistice on the peninsula. The meeting was the first at a general level with North Korea since March 2009. "The North Koreans put a lot of weight on rank and status," said Robert Kelly, a political scientist at South Korea's Pusan National University. "Getting a general symbolizes the importance of negotiating with the North." In a statement, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the talks were "productive and cooperative and resulted in firm commitments." He said U.S. and North Korean officials would begin meeting Monday to work out the next steps, including the transfer of remains that have already collected in North Korea. The two sides also agreed to restart efforts to look for the remains of other Americans who never came home. When President Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un met June 12 in Singapore, they agreed to restart the repatriation process and both signed a statement promising the "immediate repatriation of those already identified." A week later, Trump inaccurately told a crowd of supporters that 200 Americans' remains "have been sent back." Military officials later denied this but said they were on alert for the transfer of remains, with prearrangements made - including the storage of 100 caskets at the DMZ. Pompeo traveled to Pyongyang on July 6 and 7 in a bid to make progress on U.S.-North Korea talks. His visit was widely expected to coincide with the transfer of some of the remains, but none were moved at that time. After Pompeo left North Korea, the country's Foreign Ministry released a statement that called the U.S. negotiating stance "regrettable" and criticized the focus on denuclearization. Thousands of Americans were left in Korea either missing in action or as prisoners after the war ended. The United States and North Korea have engaged before in sustained diplomacy to bring back remains, but the process has often been fraught with practical difficulties and mistrust. As diplomatic tensions rose between the two countries, transfers of remains were halted in 2005 during the administration of President George W. Bush.

--Carol Morello contributed to this report