



Shadows of War

Violence along the Korean Demilitarized Zone

Capt. Michael Anderson, U.S. Army

As the Korean War raged in its final years over the terrain that would eventually divide North and South Korea, Gen. James A. Van Fleet, commander of the Eighth Army, told his superior, Gen. Matthew B. Ridgeway, then commander of the United Nations (UN) Forces, “Communist forces will violate the terms of the treaty as they have in the past by improving their potentialities for unexpected renewal of aggression.”¹ Accordingly, from the armistice in 1953 to the 1990s, danger, violence, and death typified American military service along the demilitarized zone (DMZ), the area along the 38th parallel between the communist Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea) and the Republic of Korea (South Korea, or ROK). The hostilities and hazards continued beyond the Korean War cease-fire, resulting in over two hundred U.S. casualties, including nearly one hundred fatalities. Without unification between the two governments, the threat and danger ebbed and flowed over time but always remained.

The ongoing violent struggle along the DMZ has taken the lives of many Americans, affected even more, and stands as an important aspect of U.S. Army history. This hazardous duty is often completed without the normal awards and recognition given to soldiers serving in other dangerous postings. There are no campaign streamers or parades, and there is limited and largely retroactive recognition of wartime service with combat patches and combat badges for DMZ conflict, but these omissions do not take away the truth behind the dangerous duty many American soldiers conducted in the years after the 1953 armistice in Korea.

Ending the War and Instituting the DMZ

Less than a year after hostilities began on 25 June 1950, the Joint Chiefs of Staff issued guidance on 27 March 1951 regarding the question of a DMZ. They directed the DMZ to comprise an area twenty miles

wide and to be centered along, or just north of, the 38th parallel (based on the exact battle lines at the time of any armistice signing). Ridgeway’s consultations with his subordinate, Van Fleet, on what area best fits the criteria for a DMZ drove the final years of the conflict. As early as 23 June 1951, Soviet Union overtures for peace negotiations came to the United States; however, the war dragged on for another two years.²

Cease-fire talks progressed, and on the morning of 27 July 1953, Lt. Gen. William Harrison Jr., senior delegate for the UN Forces, signed the armistice in the presence of the North Korean delegation. Gen. Mark W. Clark, UN Forces commander, noted this was a purely military cease-fire, leaving it to the diplomats to determine the lasting political solution. He further emphasized that there would be no UN withdrawals or lowering of its guard along the DMZ until a permanent solution materialized.³

By mid-June 1954, Clark’s hopeful political solution died with the failure of the delegation talks in Switzerland, as both Korean governments stubbornly affirmed that unification and elections were impossible without one side’s complete abdication, leaving only the cease-fire armistice.⁴ The Korean War cost the UN Command over 500,200 soldiers, with 94,000 killed. The United States lost 33,629 soldiers while 103,284 were wounded and 5,178 were missing in action or prisoners of war at the time of the cease-fire. The ROK lost 58,217 soldiers with 175,743 wounded. North Korean and Chinese forces losses remained unclear, with estimations as high as 1.5 million.⁵ Estimations placed civilian losses in both North and South Korea at over a million each.

Though achieving minor territorial changes, the UN Forces preserved the ROK. In the end, the DMZ narrowed to four kilometers due to the insistence of North Korea, although the UN held firm to making the geography align with the stabilized battlefield, rather than defaulting back to the exact 38th parallel.⁶ Called by many American soldiers “the loneliest spot in the world,” the DMZ stretched

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Previous page: U.S. and South Korean troops inspect the bodies of North Korean special forces infiltrators killed during the January 1968 “Blue House” [name of the presidential residence] assassination raid in Seoul against South Korean President Park Chung-hee. Of the thirty-one attackers, most were killed, one was captured alive, and one other escaped back to North Korea. (Photo from Korean Newsletter, <https://president.jp/articles/-/23398>)

across one end of the peninsula to other from the Sea of Japan on the east to the Yellow Sea on the west, split by the Imjin River and rolling terrain.⁷

The Quiet War: Violence along the DMZ from 1966 to 1969

The first major outbreak of violence along the DMZ following the cease-fire erupted while American focus was concentrated on Vietnam. Taking advantage of American resources divided between Europe and Vietnam, the North Korean communist regime under Kim Il-sung intensified efforts to undermine and destabilize the ROK government and inspire an uprising through a robust infiltration campaign. These incidents, labeled the “Quiet War” by South Koreans, marked the most violent episodes of the postwar DMZ.

Prior to the renewed North Korean infiltration in 1966, only eight U.S. soldiers died along the DMZ in isolated, uncoordinated exchanges of gunfire.⁸ In October 1966, the first confrontations along the DMZ saw occasional gunfire exchanged along the South Korean sections of the DMZ. In multiple small-scale engagements along the east, central, and western sections of the DMZ, North Koreans killed twenty-eight ROK soldiers in a series of raids; there were no Americans involved. However, in the early hours of 2 November 1966, North Korean infiltrators ambushed an eight-man U.S. 2nd Infantry Division patrol. The ambush was one of the deadliest engagements along the DMZ and the first major action involving Americans. With small arms and grenades, North Koreans killed seven Americans and one Korean Augmentation to the United States Army (KATUSA) soldier. The North Koreans bayoneted and shot some of



(Original map by Rishabh Tatiraju via Wikimedia Commons; modified by Arin Burgess, *Military Review*)

Korean Demilitarized Zone

the bodies before looting them of ammunition, weapons, and souvenirs, including taking Pvt. David L. Bibee's watch as he played dead. Bibee, who was knocked unconscious in the opening explosions, was unknowingly left alive and later told reporters, “I played like I was dead. The only reason I’m alive now is because I didn’t move.”⁹ That evening on 2 November 1966, in the South Korean section of the DMZ, another ambush took place, killing two South Korean soldiers.¹⁰

In a growing Cold War that stretched from Eastern Europe to Southeast Asia and the Korean DMZ, the delicate situation on the DMZ required balancing defense without sparking an increase in hostilities. The balance preserved the potential for political and peaceful resolution of the ongoing Korean dispute, meaning the best answer was often the presence of *manpower* versus the use of *firepower* along the DMZ. Historically, this contradicted normal U.S. approach to warfare.¹¹ In 1966, North Korean attacks totaled forty-two, but the violence followed a seasonal pattern, dropping in the winter months and peaking in springtime.¹²



The American response came in January 1967 from Gen. Charles H. Bonesteel, commander of the combined U.S. and ROK forces, with a focus on stemming North Korean infiltration.¹³ The combined U.S. and ROK forces established an innovative and enduring infiltrator “net” in the DMZ. The net consisted of four parts: forward patrols, integrated guard posts, an improved physical barrier along the DMZ, and pre-positioned quick-reaction forces. Forming the patrolling portion of the net, squad- and platoon-sized elements went out for up to twenty-four-hour periods, with each company within the areas assigned to American forces along the DMZ having a patrol out at all times. They moved during daylight and established ambushes at night.¹⁴ The improved physical barrier, a ten-foot-tall chain-link fence with triple-strand concertina wire along the top remained formidable, and a raked sand path on the southern side highlighted any infiltrator foot traffic. A nearly 120-yard open area beyond the sand path was laced with mines and tanglefoot wire.¹⁵ Engineers cleared grounds and installed searchlights and sensors, increasing visibility between guard posts. Another

The Third Tunnel of Aggression, or Third Infiltration Tunnel, is one of four known tunnels crossing under the border between North Korea and South Korea and extending south of Panmunjom. This photo was taken 10 August 2011 inside the tunnel. (Photo by Daugilas via Wikimedia Commons)

innovation came from the Army importing buckwheat, the white blooms of the grain making thermal signatures more detectable when using night vision.¹⁶

Bonesteel emphasized the physical barrier was not meant to stop infiltrators but rather to hinder them and alert forces of intrusions for rapid application of the reaction forces to catch them.¹⁷ By the nature of their purpose and demand for mobility, these quick reaction forces typically came from mounted units with limited air mobility. Although successful for Bonesteel’s stated purpose, the barrier fencing faced funding challenges, spanning only two of the ten divisional fronts along the DMZ (one U.S. infantry division and nine ROK divisions held positions along the southern portion of the DMZ).¹⁸

Even with the increasing violence, it was 30 July 1968, roughly eighteen months later, when Bonesteel received all required funding to complete the barrier fence across the length of the DMZ.¹⁹

Rotating units along the DMZ was also implemented under Bonesteel to counter North Korean infiltration. Rotation allowed soldiers to rest while providing training opportunities in the latest patrolling techniques and equipment. While behind the DMZ, units combined these patrolling drills with actual rear area security sweeps, supporting the South Korean-led counterinsurgency efforts.²⁰

Despite these efforts, the North Korean infiltration continued. From May 1967 to January 1968, American forces in South Korea suffered fifteen casualties and sixty-five injuries in over three hundred reported violent incidents.²¹ South Korean casualties topped one hundred killed and two hundred wounded.²² In May 1967, North Korean infiltrators blew up a U.S. barrack.²³ The skies above the DMZ saw North and South Korean jets sparring, and the seas along the coast saw engagements between the two small-boat navies, resulting in increased casualties between the two sides without U.S. involvement. Dealing with seaborne infiltration along the South Korean coastline, an area twenty-eight times as large as the DMZ, was wholly a South Korean endeavor.²⁴

On 30 October 1968, the South Koreans repulsed the largest landings yet by North Korean special operations teams, significantly breaking the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's effort to foment insurrection in the South. One hundred twenty communist infiltrators landed on eight separate beachheads along the Ulchin-Samcheok village to facilitate guerrilla units undermining the South Korean government. Within two weeks, the South Koreans killed 110 Korean People's Army (KPA, the de facto army of North Korea) special operations officers and captured seven more at the cost of losing sixty-three of their men, including twenty-three civilians.²⁵

After recovering from the failure of their seaborne-based subversion, a specially trained North Korean infiltration team of twenty-six personnel penetrated the U.S. section of the DMZ on 17 January 1968. Its mission was to assassinate the South Korean president in his residence, the Blue House, with a secondary target of the U.S. embassy compound. However, local South Korean woodcutters alerted authorities. A diligent policeman grilled the infiltrators, foiling their attack less than a mile from the Blue House. The multiday hunt was the costliest

part of the incident, as the would-be assassins fled north. During this pursuit, three Americans died and three were wounded, while sixty-eight South Koreans died and sixty-six were wounded including soldiers, police, and civilians. The North Korean infiltrators suffered twenty-three killed, one captured, and two missing in action (presumed dead), comprising the entire force.²⁶ However, a KPA survivor of the infiltration stated that getting through the U.S. zone was "quite easy."²⁷ The 1968 attempt was the final mass-scale infiltration by the KPA.

From more than seven hundred actions in 1968, barely over one hundred incidents occurred in 1969.²⁸ The first months of 1969 had multiple infiltration attempts across the DMZ fail without losses to South Korean or American forces. The intensity of North Korean hostility dropped off as precipitously as it had spiked in 1966. The spring campaign season saw an increase in skirmishing between the forces along the DMZ but fewer attempts at infiltration. There would not be any more major offensive operations such as those made during the Quiet War.

The KPA's attacks in 1969 largely consisted of ambushing common laborers in the DMZ. On one occasion, KPA forces killed one laborer, with two additional dying when the medical evacuation helicopter crashed after takeoff. In mid-October, a team of North Korean soldiers patrolling the DMZ ambushed four Americans soldiers foolishly driving in a Jeep through the DMZ with a white flag.²⁹ This ambush signaled the last American deaths in the final days of the Quiet War.

Between 1966 and 1969, seventy U.S. lives were lost and 111 soldiers were wounded, with the ROK force suffering 299 fatalities and 550 injuries. In comparison, 397 KPA soldiers were killed, twelve were captured, and thirty-three defected to the south. The total wounded remains unknown.³⁰ A memorandum from the Joint Chiefs of Staff stated, "These men serving along the demilitarized zone (DMZ) are no longer involved in cold war operations. They are involved ... in combat where vehicles are blown up by mines, patrols are ambushed, and psychological operations are conducted."³¹ A newspaper quoted one U.S. soldier saying, "There's a war here too," referring to the focus on Vietnam.³²

Tunnels, Trees, and Gunfights

The early 1970s saw limited violence with virtually all of it in the South Korean zones. However, even as the violence decreased, a new dimension emerged with the first

discovery of a North Korean tunnel. On 20 November 1974, a South Korean patrol discovered a tunnel reaching a kilometer into the DMZ, resulting in a short gunfight without injuries. A North Korean device exploded five days later during the investigation of the tunnel, killing U.S. Navy Cmdr. Robert M. Ballinger and his South Korean counterpart as well as injuring five other Americans.

company composed of 166 soldiers, of which roughly a hundred were American, at Camp Kitty Hawk near the JSA town of Panmunjom.

Typical of duty on the DMZ, a simple activity such as trimming a forty-foot tall Normandy poplar tree could turn violent without warning. In June 1976, while trying to trim trees, a firefight between South Korean troops

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This marked the beginning of a subterranean battle between North Korean tunneling and U.S. and Republic of Korea detection and countertunneling efforts. A joint U.S. and ROK tunnel neutralization team equipped with seismic equipment served as the main countereffort. A second tunnel discovered in March 1975 and a third discovered in November 1978 via a tip provided by a North Korean defector indicated the longevity of the threat. The third tunnel reached four hundred meters into South Korea, less than two miles from an American base.³³ The massive tunnels had electricity and had an estimated capacity to move ten thousand to thirty thousand troops an hour with up to four soldiers marching abreast.³⁴ In March 1990, another tunnel was discovered stretching across the DMZ at 225 feet below the surface.³⁵ The tunnels remained an ongoing source of danger with the tunneling and countertunneling hazards adding to the inherent danger of contact with the North Koreans.

In the summer of 1976, a bloody firefight occurred that began with a simple task of trimming a tree blocking the American view in the Joint Security Area (JSA) of the “Bridge of No Return,” where prisoners of war were exchanged following the 1953 armistice. The JSA sat squarely in the center of the DMZ where the two sides met in small huts and wooden structures to discuss issues. The Americans and their allies worked daily face-to-face with North Korean counterparts in the eight hundred-yard wide JSA. Five officers and thirty enlisted American soldiers manned the JSA at any given time. These soldiers came from the special JSA

and North Korean infiltrators resulted in three deaths to both sides. Then on 5 August, both Korean forces exchanged machine-gun fire. This led to the rescheduling for the tree trimming from 7 August to 18 August. The JSA commander, Capt. Arthur Bonifas, was a Vietnam veteran with only three days left on the DMZ before returning to the United States. Under the prevailing atmosphere of the time, he decided to personally plan and lead the rescheduled detail.³⁶

Bonifas arrayed his company for the event, having one platoon approximately seven hundred meters south near checkpoint 4, another platoon on standby near the JSA compound, and his remaining platoon off duty. The captain took with him Lt. Mark T. Barrett, the leader of the platoon stationed just south of the bridge, twelve South Korean laborers (to trim the offending branches), and a small guard detail armed with ax handles for clubs (according to the armistice rules, only officers carried pistols within the JSA) with a ROK officer serving as a translator.

Ten minutes after the tree trimming detail began, eleven North Korean soldiers arrived to investigate the activities near the bridge. After confirming it was only a tree trimming detail, they backed away, returning a few moments later with a truck carrying twenty more KPA soldiers with metal pipes and clubs. When told by a North Korean officer to cease working, the American officers ignored him and signaled the South Korean laborers to continue working. A moment later, the North Korean officer screamed out in Korean, “Kill him!” and struck Bonifas from behind, knocking him to the ground.



As the guard from the nearby American outpost watched through binoculars, he saw the North Koreans swarm the fallen Bonifas, beating him to death with metal pipes and clubs, while Barrett fled to a nearby ravine pursued by several club-wielding North Koreans. Meanwhile, the South Korean laborers fled, dropping their tools, and were chased and beaten by KPA soldiers who picked up their tools and began swinging them in their brutal assault.³⁷

The attack lasted four violent minutes. The JSA response force arrived too late to influence the actual hostilities. They evacuated the mortally wounded Bonifas and recovered Barrett's body, found bludgeoned in the ravine. Four other American soldiers suffered wounds along with five South Koreans in the incident.³⁸

The response resulted in Operation Paul Bunyan, an 813 soldier task force entering the JSA, giving the North Koreans a symbolic and unprecedented short three-minute notification on 21 August. With three B-52 bombers flying overhead, helicopters landed in an open field next to the old tree, and the task force, armed with chainsaws

North Korean soldiers attack a tree-pruning crew 18 August 1976 at the Joint Security Area within the demilitarized zone separating North Korea and South Korea in Panmunjom, Korea. In this incident, two United Nations Command guard officers of the U.S. Army, Maj. Arthur G. Bonifas and 1st Lt. Mark T. Barrett, were beaten to death by a gang of more than thirty North Korean security guards. (Photo from Hum Images/Alamy Stock Photo)

and axes and supported by Cobra helicopter gunships, cut it down in forty-five minutes. They left behind a waist-high, four-foot diameter stump where the poplar tree once stood while a hundred North Koreans passively watched from across the bridge.³⁹

Another cause of heightened tensions were defections from North Korea, which commonly occurred and at times resulted in short spurts of violence along the DMZ, emphasizing the unpredictability of daily duty and showing the instantaneous danger soldiers faced. One such violent incident began shortly before noon on Friday,

23 November 1984, when a Soviet citizen employed by the Soviet embassy in Pyongyang took a North Korean propaganda tour of Panmunjom. During the tour, Vasily Yakovlevich Matuzok, a twenty-two-year-old linguist for the embassy, suddenly sprinted from the group. Having planned his defection for over two years, he made his run as soon as he noticed a lack of attention from the KPA guards. Immediately, twenty to thirty North Koreans began chasing him, as he yelled in English, “Help me! Cover me!”⁴⁰ The North Koreans pursued Matuzok over a hundred yards into the southern portion of the JSA while firing at him. Only sidearms were authorized in the JSA, but the KPA soldiers began firing automatic rifles at the defector.⁴¹ Pvt. Michael A. Burgoyne and KATUSA partner, Cpl. Jang Myong-ki, heard the commotion as they were escorting a South Korean labor party. Quickly getting the unarmed workers to safety, the two moved to a helipad near Matuzok’s hiding spot in a clump of bushes. The two guards drew their pistols, engaging the pursuing North Koreans. Burgoyne said, “I opened fire at about fifteen [KPA soldiers] and they all stopped and started firing at me.” Hiding behind a tree, Burgoyne’s fire killed one of the first two North Koreans firing at Matuzok. Burgoyne was less than ten feet from Jang when the KATUSA was struck by a bullet just below the right eye, killing him. Shortly thereafter, in the intensifying gunfire, Burgoyne was struck by a bullet in the neck.⁴²

The firefight rapidly escalated in a matter of seconds as ten Americans and the KATUSAs exited checkpoint 4, engaging the North Koreans. Two more soldiers from checkpoint 5 engaged the KPA soldiers, all firing .45 caliber semiautomatic pistols. This fire drove the KPA soldiers into an isolated area called the “Sunken Garden.”

Less than one minute after Matuzok crossed over and the firing began, the leader of the platoon on shift, Lt. Thomas Thompson reported the shots fired and started the process to get the motorized, more heavily armed, quick reaction force (QRF) moving from their position at Camp Kitty Hawk.

At 1140, the QRF dismounted a hundred meters from checkpoint 2 in the JSA with three squads of nine riflemen and an attached machine gun team. While the QRF maneuvered into position, Spc. Jon Orlicki lobbed forty-millimeter grenades from his M203 launcher into the “Sunken Garden,” killing at least one North Korean and injuring others. The commander of the JSA security force, Capt. Bert K. Mizusawa, orchestrated an envelopment of

the isolated KPA soldiers by reinforcing the guard posts and swung the squads of Staff Sgt. Richard Lamb and Staff Sgt. Curtis Gissendanner over open ground. This group encountered an unarmed civilian, who they quickly identified as Matuzok, and passed him to the platoon sergeant for handling. Mizusawa continued maneuvering his forces, and Lamb’s squad came within fifteen meters of the North Koreans before the KPA soldiers started raising their hands in surrender. While this was happening, the North Korean command team in the JSA frantically called their UN counterparts and requested a cease-fire. The request quickly went up to the UN Command in Seoul, whose priority was to maintain the armistice and mitigate any lasting impacts from incidents affecting ongoing talks, and it was approved.⁴³

The entire firefight lasted forty-five minutes, the first ten minutes being the most intense. The toll rested with one South Korean killed, one American wounded, three North Koreans killed, and one wounded North Korean. After the November shootout, an American soldier stationed along the DMZ said, “It makes it all a lot more real.”⁴⁴

Gunfire exchanges remained a common violent occurrence along the DMZ even after 1984, with South Koreans facing the most danger and fewer involving Americans; the phased withdrawal of American forces from guard posts and checkpoints along the DMZ into camps miles away left only a small contingent within the JSA. The violence shifted to major confrontations at sea centered on the coast and nearby islands, with limited air incidents.⁴⁵ The remaining land-based danger consisted of unregistered minefields; on 4 August 2015 two South Korean soldiers were injured by mines outside their gate as they departed on a DMZ patrol.⁴⁶

The Question of Combat Recognition

During the height of the Quiet War, the Joint Chiefs of Staff designated the area north of the Imjin River and south of the DMZ as a hostile fire zone, making troops eligible for combat awards and additional pay. However, the criteria for receiving these combat awards, such as the combat infantryman badge being awarded to infantrymen having directly engaged the enemy in combat, had stricter qualifications compared to the same awards for those serving in Vietnam.⁴⁷ The additional criteria in the February 1995 edition of Army Regulation 600-8-22, *Military Awards*, which governed

the awards for service in Korea, stated the soldier had to have “served in the hostile fire area at least 60 days and been authorized hostile fire pay ... Been engaged with the enemy in the hostile fire area or in active ground combat involving an exchange of small arms fire at least 5 times.”⁴⁸ Exceptions to this additional stipulation, which were different than that for soldiers in Vietnam, did not apply to those killed or wounded. In these cases, the requirement of five engagements and the sixty-day requirement were waivable. For the wounded, it could only be waived “when it can be clearly established that the wound was a direct result of overt hostile action.”⁴⁹

For the first time since the 1953 cease-fire, soldiers serving in the DMZ received combat recognition, including hostile fire pay, an overseas service bar for six months of service, and a combat patch (to be worn on their right sleeve) as well as the combat infantryman badge and combat medical badge. Prior to 1 April 1968, service on the DMZ was no different from garrison duty elsewhere, and combat pay and combat awards were only given posthumously or to the wounded. If the soldier was not killed or wounded in an engagement, it was like it never even happened.⁵⁰ Beyond the Quiet War, recognition was tied specifically and directly to events rather than duty locations as with other cases. Though dangerous, other violent actions along the DMZ, however sporadic and isolated, were not immediately recognized by the Army.

Support from Congress, DMZ veterans, and families created enough momentum that the Army reassessed the recognition of dangerous duty along the DMZ, resulting in policy adjustment on 18 May 2000 that authorized combat awards and combat patches. This first change applied only to the firefight to protect and rescue Soviet defector Matuzok on 23 November 1984 in the JSA specifically. This was only the second time the Army provided combat recognition to actions on the DMZ after the armistice. Shortly following this, the Army issued and upgraded seventeen awards for the November 1984 firefight on 29 June, including four Silver Stars, which were awarded to Capt. Bert K. Mizusawa, Staff Sgt. Richard Lamb, Spc. Jon Orlicki, and Pvt. Mark Deville.⁵¹

Following the evolving perspective on DMZ duty, the Army continued to change its overall policy on combat awards. On 3 June 2005, the Army issued a memorandum revoking previous special requirements placed on actions along the DMZ with regards to combat badges, even allowing retroactive submissions for the awards

with documentation proving the events met the standard criteria applied to combat awards in other locations. The change stated, “The special requirements for award of the CIB [Combat Infantry Badge] for service in the Republic of Korea ... are hereby rescinded. Army veterans and service members who served in Korea subsequent to 28 July 1953 and meet the CIB criteria ... may submit an application ... for award of the CIB.” The same changes applied for the Combat Medical Badge as well.⁵² These changes further solidified in the republication of the Army’s military awards regulation on 11 December 2006 with the date range for Korea extended to cover 4 January 1969 to 31 March 1994.

The other major identifying feature for combat recognition is a unit patch on the right shoulder from when one served, commonly known as a combat patch. This decoration has remained steadily over time and Army Regulation 670-1, *Wear and Appearance of the Uniform*, has always kept it very exclusive stating, “Also between 1 April 1968 and 31 August 1973, for those personnel who were awarded the Purple Heart, combat infantryman badge, combat medical badge, or who qualified for at least one month of hostile fire pay for service in a hostile fire area in Korea.”⁵³ Like the specific exception for the combat badges, the Army also authorized the combat patch for soldiers “who participated directly in the firefight with North Korean guards at the Joint Security Area, Panmunjom, Korea” on 23 November 1984, as a result of Matuzok defecting to the JSA.⁵⁴ This recognition was an important step in bringing attention to this dangerous event.

Conclusion

Danger and bravery typified service along the DMZ that has separated communist North Korea from democratic South Korea since the 1953 armistice of the Korean War. American soldiers served resolutely, facing the ever-present threat of violence and death in an isolated location far from home. During this duty, these soldiers displayed discipline, doing their dangerous work without official combat recognition. From the Quiet War of the late 1960s, through the tenuous violent incidents scattered through the 1970s and into the 1980s, the U.S. soldiers stationed along the DMZ served with distinction and courage equal to those in more recognized hot spots around the world. Over time, the Army recognized the oversight and authorized combat

recognition for service along the DMZ during specified time frames. At first, this was done with inequality compared to other theaters, but in the early 2000s, the Army altered its position; it retroactively made requirements the same across Army service for time

spent along the violent and dangerous DMZ and all other combat zones. Finally, since 1953, nearly one hundred deceased Americans and numerous wounded veterans received due recognition for their service along the remote DMZ. ■

Notes

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