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Symbol of a Fallen Leader

By Karolyn Bredberg

Since the time of Genghis Khan, whose chargers were sacrificed after the burial of the lost conqueror to serve their master in afterlife, the riderless horse has become a tradition in state funerals. A caparisoned steed follows the gun carriage with a saber and polished, spurred boots turned backward as a symbol that a fallen leader will ride no more.

Sixty years ago, in November 1963, people around the world joined horrified Americans as they watched television coverage of the assassination of President Kennedy.

The President died on November 22. The President's widow, members of his family and his government slept very little in the days following as they planned an elaborate state funeral for November 25. They relied on archival documents for information from the services for Abraham Lincoln in 1865 and Franklin Roosevelt in 1945.

For the riderless horse, Mrs. Kennedy considered using Sardar, a bay gelding given to her by President Ayub Khan of Pakistan, but then the twenty-six horse stable at Fort Myer in Arlington, Virginia, was ordered to pick one of their own animals. Of two available chargers, Black Jack was considered the best looking: a black Morgan/Quarter Horse cross with a little star.

Seventeen years old, Black Jack had been assigned to Caisson Platoon after he joined the Third U. S. Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard) at Fort Myer because of his high spirits, feisty personality and unwillingness to carry a rider. His temperament caused some concern for the cavalry: with the strength of a stallion, he might bolt when confronted with the crowds lining the state funeral route, the white lines on Pennsylvania Avenue, and the slow tempo of the caisson. Pfc Arthur Carlson from Alabama was chosen to handle him, along with other young infantrymen, selected for their brawn, horsemanship and experience, to handle the horses drawing the gun carriage.

For the first part of the funeral, Carlson and Black Jack followed the caisson from the stable at Fort Myer, through Arlington National Cemetery, across Memorial Bridge, to the courtyard inside the Treasury Building. They waited there, resting and re-checking harnesses, straps and equipment.

When they moved out, they exited through a narrow street-level tunnel, barely large enough for the horses and caisson. A large steel grate was leaning against a wall inside the tunnel, and the hub of the right rear wheel of the caisson hooked it and started dragging it along the cobblestone paving and the stone wall, creating a tremendous racket. The noise was ear-shattering. Black Jack became wild and stayed agitated for the next three days, during all the funeral processions. Instead of standing steady at the White House, Black Jack kept throwing his head as he danced around. They carried the president's body from the White House to the Capitol to lie in state, with Black Jack and Carlson in their usual position, behind and facing the casket. Then they returned to the stable, where they heard that the TV people had noticed and remarked constantly about Black Jack and the soldier with him.

After lying in state, the caisson moved the president's body to Saint Matthew's Cathedral for the funeral service. Black Jack was still unsettled; sweat streamed off his flanks, even though the temperature was thirty degrees, as his hoofs clattered on the pavement and he showed the whites of his eyes.

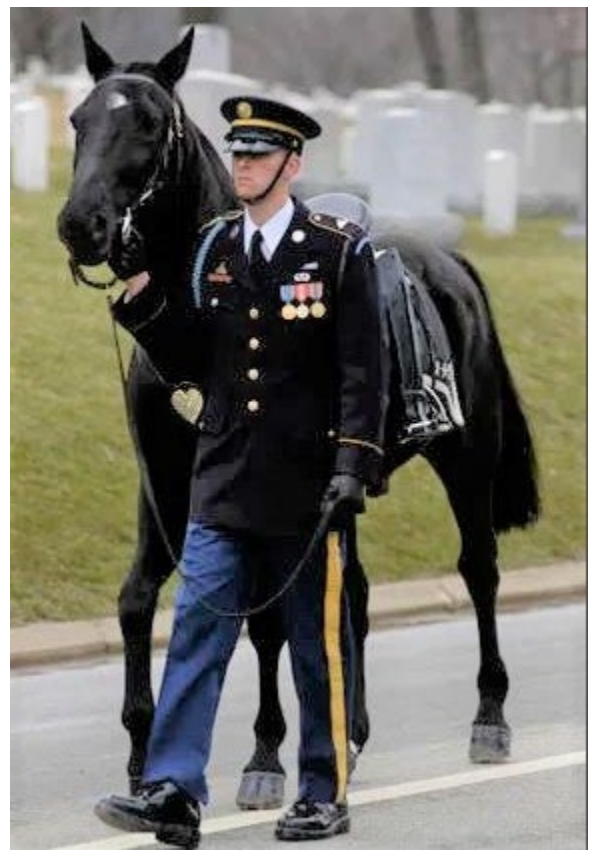
As the caisson approached, the soldiers lining the route at parade rest came to attention. A female major quietly slipped up behind each man and whispered, as she placed it into his hand, "It's a sugar cube. Put it in your mouth and suck it when you get the chance," because standing so long in one place leads to dehydration and falling blood sugar.

At the cathedral the crowds, hushed and silent, took care to give Black Jack plenty of space. At one point he was pawing the pavement and struck Carlson's right foot, destroying the shoe.

After the funeral service, they moved on toward Arlington National Cemetery. Black Jack continued to prance and rear his head. As he held the horse, Carlson diverted his attention from his aching right arm by staying in step with the stirring, martial music of the bagpipers.

Later, the New York Times reported, "the black, riderless horse that symbolized the lost leader in the funeral procession of President Kennedy today seemed spirited and difficult to handle. Perhaps the most poignant touch of all was the sight of the huge steed, not quite black, more of a dark chestnut, spiritedly trailing the horse-drawn caisson and its coffin of the deceased president."

Black Jack became a celebrity as he captured the hearts of people around the world, enchanted by his proud carriage and high stepping. During his service as a caparisoned horse, he participated in funerals for Presidents Herbert Hoover, Lyndon Johnson, John Kennedy and General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, as well as hundreds of other funeral processions.



Flag-draped casket of President John F. Kennedy departs from the U.S. Capitol. The riderless horse 'Black Jack' with empty reversed boots is seen in lower left.

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Images Courtesy of John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.

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Excerpts from President Lyndon B. Johnson's Thanksgiving Day Address to the American People, November 28, 1963:

All of us have lived through 7 days that none of us will ever forget. We are not given the divine wisdom to answer why this has been, but we are given the human duty of determining what is to be, what is to be for America, for the world, for the cause we lead, for all the hopes that live in our hearts.

More than any generation before us, we have cause to be thankful, so thankful, on this Thanksgiving Day. Our harvests are bountiful, our factories flourish, our homes are safe, our defenses are secure. We live in peace. The good will of the world pours out for us….A deed that was meant to tear us apart has bound us together. Since last Friday, Americans have turned to the good, to the decent values of our life.

In each administration the greatest burden that the President had to bear has been the burden of his own countrymen's unthinking and unreasoning hate and division.

So, in these days, the fate of this office is the fate of us all. I would ask all Americans on this day of prayer and reverence to think on these things.

Let all who speak and all who teach and all who preach and all who publish and all who broadcast and all who read or listen - let them reflect upon their responsibilities to bind our wounds, to heal our sores, to make our society well and whole for the tasks ahead of us.

It is this work that I most want us to do: to banish rancor from our words and malice from our hearts; to close down the poison spring of hatred and intolerance and fanaticism; to perfect our unity north and south, east and west; to hasten the day when bias of race, religion, and region is no more; and to bring the day when our great energies and decencies and spirit will be free of the burdens that we have borne too long.

Korean War Prisoners Of War
By Don Simpson

Since the beginning of warfare, those captured by the enemy have suffered privation, uncertainty, illness, malnutrition, lingering and sudden death. Few prisoners suffered more than our prisoners captured by the North Koreans and the Chinese during the Korean War.

The Geneva Conventions have attempted to provide standards for the humane treatment of prisoners of war and non-combatants. However, not all belligerents have adhered to those standards. Neither North Korea nor Communist China signed the conventions and certainly did not adhere to them.

The recorded number of American POWs in the Korean War was 7,140. 8,529 US personnel were carried as Missing In Action (MIA) at the end of the war. By 1973, that number was reduced to 8,157. Most POWs were captured during the first six months of the war - during the initial North Korean onslaught through South Korea in June through September, 1950, and the entry of the Chinese into the war in October - December 1950.

The North Korean Army crossed the 38th Parallel into South Korea on 25 June 1950. The Republic of Korea (ROK) Army was unable to stop them. The United Nations condemned the attack and requested that member nations rally to the defense of South Korea. The United States led the effort and the designated United Nations commander was US General Douglas MacArthur, commander in the Far East. Occupation forces in Japan were ordered to Korea.

The initial units from the 24th Infantry Division went into defensive positions near Osan thirty miles southeast of the South Korean capital of Seoul. These units were driven back as the remainder of the 24th moved into positions around the city of Taejon. Taejon fell to the North Korean Army on 20 July and over 1,200 soldiers from the 24th were missing in action; approximately 600 of those were captured.

United Nations forces withdrew to a defensive perimeter around the port city of Pusan in the southeast corner of South Korea. A desperate defense of the Pusan Perimeter existed until 15 September 1950 when the 1st Marine Division and the 7th Infantry Division conducted an amphibious landing at the port city of Inchon, midway up the west coast of the Korean peninsula and eighteen miles west of Seoul.

The landing met little resistance. Forces within the Pusan Perimeter broke out and attacked north on 18 September 1950.

Seoul was retaken on 26 September and on 7 October 1950, UN forces crossed the 38th Parallel into North Korea and continued to attack north. By 1 November 1950, forces of the Eighth Army and X Corps were approaching the Yalu River, the border between North Korea and Communist China. Unknown to UN intelligence, the Chinese Communist Forces (CCF) had begun infiltrating into North Korea in mid-October.

On 1 November, elements of the 8th Cavalry Regiment were hit near Unsan, seventy miles south of the Yalu River, resulting in the capture of a large number of soldiers. In late November, the 2nd Infantry Division was hit and elements cut off near the Yalu River on the western side of North Korea. On the eastern side, the 1st Marine Division and the 7th Infantry Division were hit hard near the Chosin Reservoir. Large numbers of soldiers were captured in both attacks.

UN Forces withdrew over the next month to positions south of the capital of Seoul and for the second time Seoul fell to the communist forces. Over the next six months, there were a series of Chinese offensives and UN counteroffensives until the main line of resistance stabilized north of the 38th Parallel. On 23 June 1951, the Soviet Ambassador to the UN suggested that a settlement be negotiated to end the war. On 10 July 1951, the Truce Talks began. The war, then, went into what was known as the Stalemate Phase.

The Truce Talks were characterized by delays, stalling and walkouts by the Chinese and North Korean negotiators. However, by January 1952, all issues were resolved except the return of communist POWs. Of 132,000 held by the UN, nearly one-third did not wish to return to China or North Korea. Because of the negative propaganda impact, neither the Chinese nor the North Koreans would agree for them to stay. Because of this issue, the war went on for another eighteen months.

Prisoners captured early in the war were marched to holding areas near the North Korean capital, Pyongyang. Also located in Pyongyang were civilians: diplomats, missionaries, teachers and businessmen detained during the initial North Korean onslaught. Many prisoners were wounded and carried along by fellow prisoners. No medical aid was provided and many died along the way. Groups were marched during the day and spent the night in fields or empty buildings. Food provided was meager, usually corn and millet. Water, if available, was not potable and many prisoners developed dysentery and other waterborne diseases. The North Koreans did nothing to alleviate the suffering.

On 5 September, the prisoners in Pyongyang were loaded on a train and travelled to Manpo, located along the Yalu River. These prisoners were later moved on foot to a location farther to the northeast.

American POWs always referred to movement by foot as Death Marches. These marches occurred from places of capture to temporary camps or holding areas and from there to the permanent camps. One of the most notorious was the Tiger Death March that took place in North Korea in the fall of 1950. In late October, 765 American soldiers and eighty civilian internees were being held in a temporary camp outside Manpo. United Nations forces were attacking north and the North Korean authorities directed that the prisoners be moved farther to the north and east. A ruthless North Korean Major known as "The Tiger" was in command of the group. Most of the POWs had been captured in July 1950 and were in their fourth month of captivity. Many were suffering from combat wounds; all were in poor physical condition.

Before the march began on October 31, 1950, the Tiger addressed the group. He indicated that it would be a long, difficult march and that everyone would be expected to keep up. No stragglers would be tolerated. When English Salvation Army High Commissioner Herbert Lord, fluent in Korean and acting as the interpreter, said that the elderly civilians could not make such a march, the Tiger retorted, "Let them march till they die".

On the second day, the pace was brutal and many were falling behind. A lieutenant who was a march element leader - the person in front of the line of marching troops - was brutally executed by the Tiger as an example that all marchers must keep up. Similar incidents occurred when soldiers and civilians fell behind.

A guard would remain with the individual until the group had passed. A single shot would ring out, and the guard would return alone to the column. The straggler was never seen again.

On the ninth day, November 8, 1950, the march ended at Chunggang. The group had covered over 100 miles. Over 100 prisoners were left dead along the route. Of the original 765 soldiers, less than 300 were alive twelve months later, a survival rate of only 35%.

Mass murder also occurred. One of the worst incidents was in a railroad tunnel near Sunchon, North Korea, on October 30, 1950. Over 100 American POWs had been loaded on four open railroad cars near Pyongyang, a week earlier. They were being moved north ahead of advancing United Nations forces. The train was stopped in a railroad tunnel ten miles north of Sunchon. Allied air strikes had destroyed the tracks north of the tunnel and the train could not go farther. The prisoners were ordered out of the cars and moved to ravines and fields nearby.

The prisoners were told that they were to be fed. They were organized into three columns and ordered to sit down. The guards then opened fire with automatic weapons. Many men were killed outright. The wounded were finished off with bayonets. Then the North Koreans left.

Miraculously, twenty-one men survived. The next day, BG Frank A. Allen, Jr., the Assistant Division Commander of the 1st Cavalry Division reached the site. He said it was the most gruesome sight he had ever seen. There was a pile of approximately sixty Americans in a sunken road. A total of sixty-eight POWs had been killed. BG Allen also found a shallow grave fifty yards away on the other side of the road that contained sixty more bodies from an earlier incident.

The North Koreans maintained control of the POWs until May 1951 when the Chinese assumed control. The Chinese focused on indoctrination and exploitation for propaganda purposes. Indoctrination sessions became known as "Brainwashing". Captured airmen were subjected to very harsh treatment in attempts to get them to confess to being involved in Germ Warfare. Chinese soldiers had carried typhus into Korea and many Koreans suffered from the disease. The Chinese shifted the blame for the epidemic to the US for allegedly dropping the germs from aircraft.

There were a series of temporary camps established after the Chinese entered the war. All these camps were bad, but the most notorious was the Mining Camp, also known as Death Valley. Over 50% died before being transferred to the permanent camps. (See map for camp locations.)

The permanent camps were located along the Yalu River and were run by the Chinese. Camp One opened in April 1951 and held 1,452 prisoners. Camp Two opened in October 1951 and held 350 prisoners. Camp Three held enlisted personnel, including the enlisted survivors of the Tiger Death March.

Camp Four held allied non-commissioned officers. Camp Five was the largest of the camps. It was established in January 1951 and held three-quarters of all prisoners. 50% died in the first twenty weeks of its opening. Camp Seven was occupied in Mid-March 1951 by the survivors of the Tiger Death March. In October 1951 the camp was closed and the officers were transferred to Camp Two and the enlisted men to Camp Three.

By late 1952, world opinion was shifting to the UN's side. In December 1952, the UN voted for an end to the war. In November, 1952, Dwight Eisenhower and the Republicans were elected to the White House. In March, 1953, leader of Soviet Russia Josef Stalin died, leaving his succession unclear. In April, 1953, the negotiators agreed to releasing sick and wounded prisoners. Operation Little Switch occurred on 20-26 April and resulted in the release of 149 Americans.

Finally, on 8 June 1953, the communist negotiators agreed to voluntary non-repatriation of POWs provided they were screened by a neutral commission. This resolution led to the final truce agreement that went in effect on 27 July 1953. Operation Big Switch began on 6 August and resulted in the release of 3,597 US POWs. Twenty-one US POWs who became known as "Turncoats" elected to stay behind.

Looking at the numbers based on those accounted for in Little and Big Switch plus those who stayed behind and using 7,140 as the baseline, 3,373 were unaccounted for and presumed to have died in captivity.

Accountability of POWs was and continues to be a very difficult problem. After any action, there are three categories of casualties: Killed in Action (KIAs), Wounded in Action (WIAs) and Missing in Action (MIAs). KIAs and WIAs are usually recovered. The MIAs are unaccounted for and may either be dead and remain on the battlefield or are captured. Determining their status is always difficult and in the case of the Korean War, the numbers have never been totally resolved. However, one of the truly incredible stories is about Johnson's list.

In the summer of 1950, Wayne "Johnnie" Johnson was an eighteen-year-old soldier in L Company, 34th Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division. He was captured on July 11, 1950, less than two weeks after his unit was deployed to Korea. He was marched north in a group of approximately 600 soldiers. When two or three men died a few days later, he felt it necessary to record their names so there would be a proper accounting when the war ended.

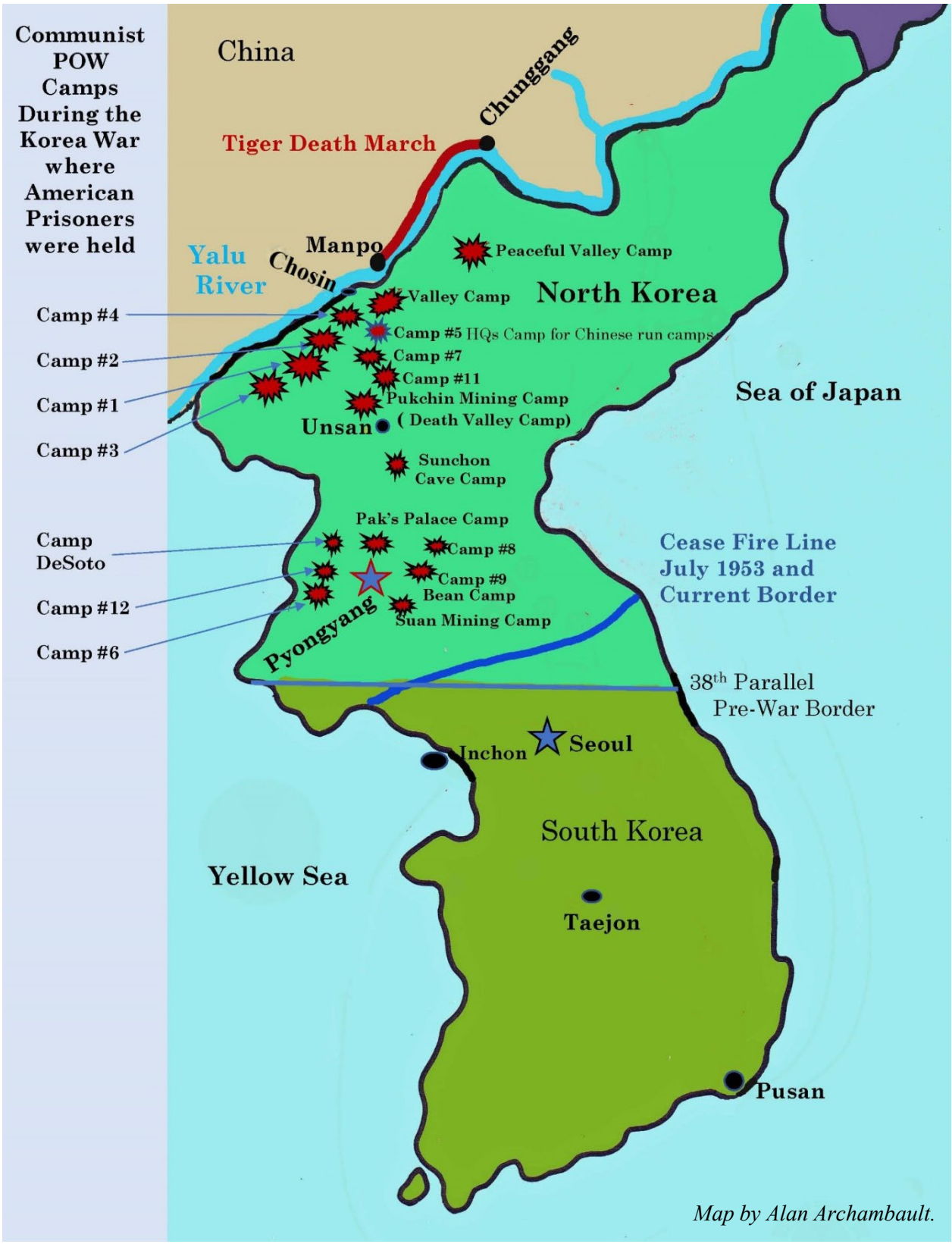
He had a small pencil and tore a piece of paper from the wall of a shack he was staying in and began recording the names of those who died. In the first four months, his list grew to over seventy names. He added another 100 names during the brutal Tiger Death March.

Between November 8, 1950 and October 1951, 300 more names were added. In October, 1951, Johnson and his fellow prisoners were moved to Camp Three. Conditions improved and few prisoners died after that. Johnson added the last of 496 names to his list in April 1952.

As the list grew, Johnson became concerned that the Chinese might discover it. He decided to copy the list and hide both copies; one in the wall of the building where he was housed; the other buried in the dirt floor. His concerns were validated when a Chinese guard discovered the list in the wall. Johnson was severely beaten, but his life was spared. The second list was not found.

When he was repatriated, Johnson hid the list in a toothpaste tube given to him by the Red Cross. He mentioned the list to the intelligence officer who debriefed him. However, the Army did not act on the information. Finally, at a reunion of former POWs in 1989, Johnson revealed that he still had the list. However, it was not until 1995 that he was interviewed by a representative of the Department of Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency. Unfortunately, many of the names could not be identified because of deterioration over the years. However, Johnson's List was used to resolve over 400 cases of individuals who were previously carried as MIA. For his efforts, Johnson was awarded the Silver Star in 1996.

The Department of Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency continues its work to identify recovered remains and reconcile those against the POW and MIA list. Periodically, boxes of remains are provided by the North Korean government. The identification process has been slow but ongoing since the end of the conflict in July 1953. Currently the status of 661 cases have been resolved; 7,486 remain as MIAs. The accounting process continues to be a difficult task and underscores the tragic plight of our POWs and MIAs and their families from the Korean War.



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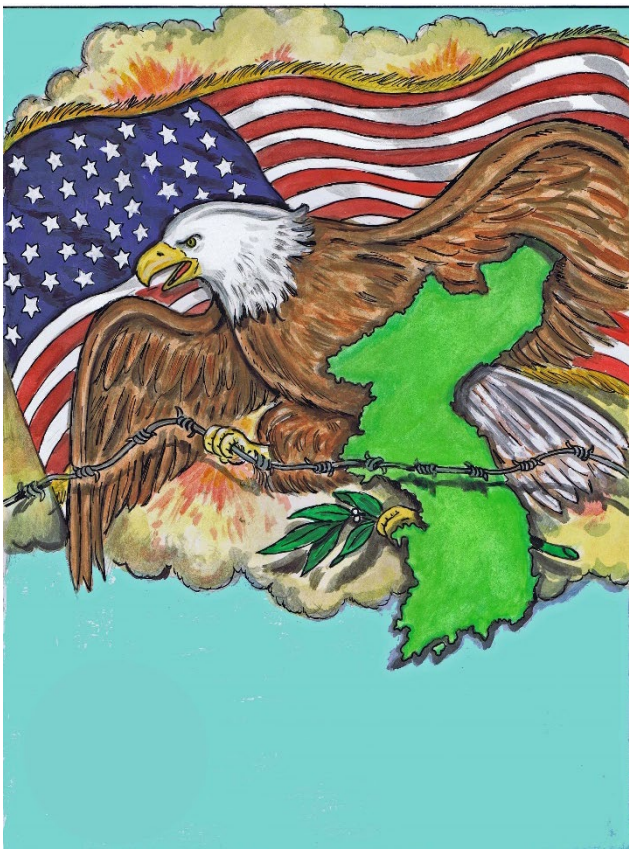

Illustration by Alan Archambault.

Fall Membership Meeting.
November 12 at Patriots Landing, Dupont.
11:30 - Social Period.
Brunch - 12:00.
Cost Of The Brunch: $18 per person.

The subject of the meeting will be the election of Friends Officers for the coming year.

Please make reservations and pay in advance to:

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