

## **August 19, 1976**

### **Letter, W. Tapley Bennett, Jr., to Isao Abe**

#### **Citation:**

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<https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/117526>

#### **Summary:**

W. Tapley Bennett sends a report of the United Nations Command on an incident in the Joint Security Area of the Demilitarized Zone in Korea. Two United Nations Command personnel were beaten to death and several others including UNC and Republic of Korea personnel were wounded by North Koreans.

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THE REPRESENTATIVE  
OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
TO THE  
UNITED NATIONS

8 JUN 1977

August 19, 1976

RECORDS CONTROL

His Excellency  
Mr. Isao Abe  
President of the Security Council  
The United Nations

PO 240 Korea (2-2-1)

Dear Mr. President:

On behalf of the Unified Command established pursuant to Security Council Resolution 84 of 7 July 1950, I have the honor to convey a report of the United Nations Command on an incident in the Joint Security Area of the Demilitarized Zone in Korea. It resulted in two United Nations Command personnel being beaten to death and the wounding of several other United Nations Command and Republic of Korea personnel by North Koreans.

At approximately 10:30 a.m., August 18, a United Nations Command work crew arrived in the vicinity of a United Nations Command checkpoint in the Joint Security Area. (This is an area located astride the four kilometer-wide demilitarized zone established pursuant to the Korean Armistice Agreement for the use of all participants on an equal basis. It is the site of the Military Armistice Commission Meetings.) The work party consisted of five Korean laborers, who were accompanied by three United Nations Command officers and a seven-man security force. Their purpose was to prune a tree which hindered observation between two United Nations Command check points. This was a routine maintenance task, of the sort frequently undertaken by both sides.

Shortly after the work began, two North Korean officers and approximately nine enlisted men drove up in a truck and got out. One of these officers began a discussion with the ranking United Nations Command officer, Captain Bonifas, and asked what he was doing. When the United Nations Command officer explained his intention the North Korean officer

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indicated concurrence with the plan, which involved pruning but not removal of the tree. The work continued for 10 or 15 minutes and some of the North Korean personnel engaged in trying to instruct the workers how the tree should be pruned.

At approximately 10:50 hours, the North Korean officer told the United Nations Command officer to stop the work. There followed a discussion between the officers of the two sides during which the North Korean officer threatened the United Nations Command personnel. The United Nations Command officer, performing a peaceful mission and within his prerogatives directed the United Nations Command personnel to continue working. At this point, the North Korean officer tried to direct the work force to stop working. The United Nations Command officer again indicated the work would continue. The North Korean officer sent a guard to a nearby Korean Peoples Army Guard Post. Within a short period of time, additional Korean Peoples Army Guards arrived both from within the Joint Security Area and from outside of the area until there were approximately 30 North Korean military personnel in the immediate area. As previously stated, the United Nations Command had 10 Security personnel and five Korean laborers.

At this point one North Korean officer took off his watch, wrapped it in a handkerchief and placed it in his pocket. Another of the officers rolled up his sleeves. The United Nations Command senior officer was busy with the tree pruning detail and did not see this. Immediately thereafter, the North Korean officer approached the United Nations Command officer and, crying "kill," struck him, knocking him to the ground. Five other North Korean personnel attacked him while he was down, continuing to beat him with fists, feet, and wooden clubs or axe handles. Other North Korean personnel (some of them also carrying axe handles and other similar objects which they used as clubs) simultaneously turned on the remaining United Nations Command personnel.

Some of the North Korean guards picked up the axes being used by the United Nations Command work party to prune the trees, and used them as weapons during the attack. These same personnel were seen beating the prostrate UN officer with the blunt head of the axes while he lay on the ground.

During the fight, which lasted about five or six minutes, the United Nations Command personnel, acting under their standing instructions, sought to break off contact and leave the area. They made no use of the firearms which they routinely carry. They picked up the body of Captain Bonifas and other injured personnel and withdrew. On assembling at another guard post they discovered that Lieutenant Barrett was missing. Returning to the scene of the incident they found him, unconscious, and removed him for medical treatment, but he was found to be dead enroute to the hospital.

The two officers killed in this incident had suffered multiple skull fractures and stab wounds. A number of photographs were taken of the incident because, based on prior experience, the United Nations Command maintains a number of cameras pre-positioned throughout the Joint Security Area. These photographs show clearly the brutality of the attack and the fact that it was in no sense an act of self-defense by the North Korean personnel. The latter appeared, moreover, to have singled out for attack the two United States officers on the scene.

Immediately after learning of the attack, the United Nations Commander requested a meeting of the Military Armistice Commission. After some delay, occasioned by North Korean efforts to deal with the issue at lower levels, this meeting was held at 1600 hours, August 19.

This incident was the culmination of a long series of harrassments and violence on the part of North Korean personnel in the Joint Security Area. In the past year, United Nations personnel (and vehicles) in the Joint Security Area have been obstructed, spat on, and struck with fists and sticks. In January of this year, the United Nations Command unilaterally reduced by half the number of armed personnel in the Joint Security Area, in an effort to reduce tensions. The United Nations Command has repeatedly called for a concerted effort to reduce tension and eliminate points of dispute along the Military Demarcation Line. There has been no satisfactory response to these numerous proposals.

I request that this letter be circulated as an official document of the Security Council.

Yours very sincerely,

*W. Tapley Bennett*  
W. Tapley Bennett, Jr.  
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