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## WORLD NEWS

# U.S. Army Deserter Gets 30-Day Sentence

## Jenkins Tells Military Court In Japan That He Feared Being Sent to Vietnam

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CAMP ZAMA, Japan -- Wrapping up a bizarre Cold War saga spanning 40 years, Sgt. Charles Robert Jenkins yesterday was handed a 30-day prison sentence -- which the judge recommended be suspended -- and a dishonorable discharge for deserting his patrol in South Korea in 1965.

Breaking down in tears on several occasions, Sgt. Jenkins, 64 years old, told a military court on a U.S. Army base near Tokyo that he had deserted amid a growing alcohol problem because he was afraid of being sent to Vietnam.



Charles Jenkins


"I no longer wanted to be in the military," he told the court. "I just wanted to go home." He said he had planned to pass through North Korea to the former Soviet Union, then turn himself in at the U.S. Embassy and eventually return to the U.S. He said he figured the North Koreans would "just want to get rid of me." Instead, he remained in the country until July of this year.

Court-martial rules required the military judge, Col. Denise Vowell, to abide by a pretrial deal that set the sentence at 30 days. She recommended that this be suspended. Military authorities will rule on the suspension later.

The trial of Sgt. Jenkins arose as an unlikely byproduct of the Cold War. From the 1970s, North Korea abducted more than a dozen Japanese to help train North Korean spies and carry out other government missions. Sgt. Jenkins married one of the abductees, Hitomi Soga, in 1980, and they had two children.

After years of campaigning by relatives and a trip to Pyongyang by Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, Ms. Soga was allowed to return to Japan in 2002. In July, the Japanese government brought Sgt.

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Jenkins to Japan to live with his wife. Because of a U.S.-Japan extradition treaty, he gave himself up to the U.S. military in September.

The happiness of the long-suffering Ms. Soga, 45, has become a national cause in Japan, making Sgt. Jenkins's treatment at the hands of the U.S. Army especially sensitive. Mr. Koizumi made direct appeals to the U.S. to deal with Sgt. Jenkins leniently.

What's more, the U.S. has recently been focusing on cementing Japan as its key strategic ally in Asia. Analysts say the U.S. likely will move army personnel there from other countries as part of its world-wide reallocation of forces.

"It's fair to say that from the U.S. government perspective, the relationship with Japan is extremely important," said an official at the U.S. embassy in Japan.

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Sgt. Jenkins's testimony provided a chilling flashback to the Cold War era. A native of North Carolina, he joined the army as a teenager and rose to the rank of sergeant. But he said he became frightened of the prospect of being sent to Vietnam or on dangerous daytime patrols along the demilitarized zone separating the two Koreas.

On the freezing night of Jan. 5, 1965, he drank 10 beers before leading his patrol, he said. Around 2:30 a.m., he left his men and tied a white T-shirt to his M-14 rifle. He then crept across a minefield and walked to North Korea using a compass, he said.

Instead of going home via the Soviet Union, however, Sgt. Jenkins spent a number of years living with three other U.S. servicemen who had crossed into North Korea, and he was forced to study the writings of former North Korean leader Kim Il Sung. If a person said anything bad about Mr. Kim, or his son, current North Korean leader Kim Jong Il, "they'll dig you a hole," said Sgt. Jenkins in a heavy North Carolina accent.

While in North Korea, Sgt. Jenkins said he also participated in propaganda broadcasts, played an American villain in at least one anti-U.S. movie, and taught English to North Korean officer cadets from June 1981 to June 1985. Treatment was sometimes rough: Once, when he refused to teach, the North Korean government operatives tied him up and "beat the hell out of me," he said. Because of the language instructions he gave, he also pleaded guilty to another charge he faced, that of aiding the enemy.

U.S. military officials said Sgt. Jenkins would serve his sentence at Yokosuka naval base in Japan, and they didn't give a timetable for a decision on whether his sentence would be suspended. He later plans to live in Japan with Ms. Soga and their daughters Mika, 21, and Brinda, 19, who were released by North Korea in July.

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