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## Deserter lifts veil on closed regime

By Jeremy Kirk

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SEOUL -- Charles Robert Jenkins, sentenced last week to 30 days in prison for deserting from the U.S. Army four decades ago, may prove a valuable source of intelligence on the world's most inaccessible country, North Korea.

The 64-year-old Jenkins admitted at his trial that he had deserted to North Korea by creeping across a minefield in the demilitarized zone to avoid duty in Vietnam. He spent 39 years in North Korea, teaching English to officer cadets and appearing in propaganda films.

But before the trial, Jenkins had offered the U.S. military critical details about how North Korea uses foreigners in its spy program in exchange for an administrative discharge.

A formal request for the discharge filed in August said Jenkins was "absolutely willing to confirm a suspicion long held by U.S. intelligence agencies that a number of Americans were used, most often unwillingly, by North Korea to arm spies with English-speaking skills so they could target American interests in South Korea and beyond."

The request also said Jenkins could confirm that "at least three other Americans who are suspected of deserting to North Korea were allowed to marry East European and/or Middle Eastern women who had been brought to and held in North Korea against their will."

"In two of the cases, the Americans had multiple children who are now young adults who appear to be American or European themselves."

Military authorities rejected the offer of a deal and went ahead with last week's court-martial, but are expected to debrief the former Army sergeant regardless.

Col. Vic Warzinski, a public-affairs officer for U.S. Forces Japan, said Jenkins has been cooperative since he returned to Army custody on Sept. 11, but he would not comment on intelligence matters.

"In general, defectors have kept their value for years after the fact," said Eric Heginbotham, an expert on Korean studies at the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington. "In the North Korean case, we know so little about the society and the whole system."

Jenkins could go through an initial set of interviews and then be used later as a reference, Mr. Heginbotham said. "I think they'll want to have access to him indefinitely."

Jenkins was a nearly forgotten Cold War tumbleweed until two years ago when it was revealed he had married a Japanese abductee. Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi gained the release of five abductees, including Jenkins' wife, Hitomi Soga, after North Korean leader Kim Jong-il admitted the country had secretly snatched Japanese citizens in the 1970s and 1980s.

Mrs. Soga captured the Japanese public's sympathy by scripting simple poems about her family while

her husband and two children, Mika, 21, and Brinda, 19, remained in North Korea. They were reunited in July in Jakarta, Indonesia, after the Japanese government brought Jenkins and his children on a charter flight.

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