

Military Student Study Questions and Projects for *Catchers in the Sky, Mission Korea*

I. Reading Discussion

1. The most famous quote about Korea is ‘...it is a country far away, of which little is known.’ Only a small percentage of Americans can find it on a map. What are some of the facts you learned from the book about Korea, either North or South, politically, geographically, militarily, culturally, or linguistically? What was the most interesting thing you learned? How did the book change the way you viewed the region? Did you disagree with the author about any of his historical representations of the Korean War or World War II with respect to the roles of Korea, Japan, America, China, or Russia? What about his presentation of the military life and ethos? (Or any other matter in the book?)
2. Refresh your memory and define for yourself what the concepts of ‘the sacred’ and ‘the profane’ mean. Generally, we hold some things to be sacred in our lives, as well as distance ourselves, or find a way to deal with, the profane. In the ABL(X) story, what were the sacred and profane for (pick a couple of your favorites) Maj Phillips, Dr Engle, Abbey Yamamoto, MC Capt Hull, Harold Hakkermann, Dr DeFrancis, Marshal Il-Moon, Dearest Leader, Col Kang, Architect Su, Farmers’ Red Guard Militia Leader Tong-Hu, Aide Park, or the North Korean wedding couple? In your own life, what do you hold sacred and profane? As a family member? As a student? As an officer? As a rifleman? As an American?
3. The author would say, if asked, that the theme of the book revolves around ‘Temptation,’ (The urge to embrace immediate benefits despite possible consequences). This is in contrast to ‘Morality’ or ‘Service,’ (Forgoing an immediate pleasure or benefit because of future consequences). For the characters, how is the life of service reflected in this book? What is each major character’s temptation? Given you are in the service already, what made you chose the life of service? What do you think will be your temptations? In what sense is ‘Dream’ (A desired future that does not fall within reasonable expectations) the counterpoint to temptation and service?

II. Military Studies

1. Use your library’s copy of “Jane’s World Armies” (or if you don’t have it, the Internet) to identify the world’s six largest armies. What are their strengths, and rough order of battle (types of weapons, units, deployment skills)? Can you identify a country where all six of these armies are in contact or in just-across-a-border proximity?

2. Using Google Earth, find a few of the interesting spots in North Korea: the Pyongyang Country Club (can you tell which are the collective fields nearby, and which are the kitchen gardens?), the Koryo Hotel, 'The Forbidden City,' the Taedong River Barrage, the JSA area, and Onch'on-up underground airfield. Also, trace the DMZ across the country, noting the terrain and roadnet. Find Seoul, Lotte World (looks like Disneyland), the Seoul Tower, and Osan AB in South Korea. Using the DIA North Korea manual, or 'The Armed Forces of North Korea,' by Joseph Bermudez, Jr, locate some bunkers, SAM sites, and artillery emplacements anywhere in the North. Check your ID of the SAM sites using www.fas.org, and evaluate the quality of your INTEL using the NIIRS scale (National Image Interpretability Rating Scale; the main Intel analyst's tool, whose definition is on www.fas.org.) You can get a start with www.jonathandamien.com/images/SAM-Sites-DPRK.kmz , which is a Google Earth file courtesy of Joe Bermudez, Jr., Jane's Defense.
3. Assume you are a foreign INTEL officer. Using the web and the library, learn all you can about the ABL, A.L.L., and the American Armed forces in Korea and Northeast Asia. Which search sites are always the best? How good would you say the American 'Op Sec' (Operations Security) is? Did you remember to locate the main unit command structures and personnel? Now, as an American INTEL officer who is asked for a fast overall brief on the DPRK, educate yourself on the North Korea armed forces, and list their basic weapons and units. What is a Chun-Ho tank? What are the per capita incomes of North and South Korea (and the USA)? Don't forget to find the DPRK's official newspaper web site, and read what is going on. Can you find any blogs on how great North Korea is? (try 'Juche Girl' if you can't find another, http://songun-blog.blogspot.com/2005_09_01_archive.html). What are the headlines today in the South Korean main newspapers like the Korean Herald, or Chosun Ilbo? Is the Iraq war mentioned? How about Japan and China? Don't forget to use Google, Yahoo, Federation of American Scientists (www.fas.org), Jane's Information Services, www.globalsecurity.org, Wikipedia, and the DoD, South Korean, and Chinese armed forces sites. Lay out a short 10 page PowerPoint brief and brief it to friends who know nothing of Korean military issues. Don't forget to list the American military facilities, and provide some political, popular, sports, military, trade, and industry information.
4. Using Google Earth or maps, surveil Osan AB. Identify their air defenses, family housing, fuels, hangars, golf course, command center, and the main parts of the base. In the book, where did the North Korean Special Forces land their choppers for their strike? How would they proceed to take over the airbase? How did Hakkermann get off the base during the attack to drive north to Seoul?
5. After reading the book, think back to the siege of the Magnolia Palace. Using Google Earth, locate Pyongyang, and find 'The Forbidden City' (The Magnolia Palace grounds), which is the North Korean leader compound. It's about 0.5 miles east of the Koryo Hotel, (or the Pyongyang train station). Knowing what you do, plan an assault on the City, with the objective to find and take the leader, knowing a battalion of army infantry defends him.

6. Consider strategies for an armored invasion of South Korea by the North. Using Google Earth and maps, fill in the details of your invasion such as Special Forces, naval, air defenses, and so on. How important is the goal of capturing Seoul? (Note Kaesong and Munson's role in this invasion). What is 'Hollingsworth?' Locate all the US installations near the DMZ. How would they play into the invasion?
7. The environment of the modern American military-industrial complex has almost as many jobs in systems development, research, and acquisition as it does in combat roles. The jobs represented on the ABL(X) are a microcosm of those in the Pentagon's acquisition, test, and logistics directorates (The OUSD, AT&L). Discuss the responsibilities of the different job positions on ABL(X): Program Manager, Chief Scientist or Scientific Advisor, Test and Evaluation Officer, Intelligence Officer, MRO (maintenance, repair, overhaul), Technician, Flight Crew, Computer programmer, physicist, engineer, Finance, Security, Training, and Contracting. Which are the most attractive to you and why?
8. Based on the discussion of Directed Energy Weapons in Chapter 15, and your own understandings, what are your opinions about how lasers will fit into warfare in 5, 10, 20, 50, and 100 years? How are they used now?
9. Choose one of the following books from the jonathandamien.com site's bibliography for a book report: *Airborne Laser, Bullets of Light; The Aquariums of Pyongyang; Present at the Creation* (Dean Acheson); *The North Korean Special Forces*,(Bermudez); *The Art of Wargaming; Assignment: Pentagon; The Complete Idiots Guide to Understanding North Korea; The Korean Language; or Who was Responsible? From Marco Polo Bridge to Pearl Harbor.*
10. Military Think Tanks study: go to the web site '<http://www.nira.go.jp/ice/index.html>' and look through their world directory of think tanks. Which country has by far the most think tanks? How many are military in nature? What other countries have a similar approach to brain-base? Look through the South Korean military/reunification think tanks. Which are the biggest ones? (Reunification is a real employer!) Look at the web sites of Brookings Institution, ICAS, Defense Studies, AEF, AFI, Nitze School, US Army War College, Air University, Naval Postgraduate School, Harvard University, MIT, Stanford, and Berkeley. Find some researchers and look at their credentials. Now study KIDA, the Korean Institute for Defense Analysis, (Their RAND). Look at the credentials of the top people. Note their academic backgrounds, accomplishments, and time spent working in the United States. Would you be willing to serve overseas in a very foreign land this numbers of years to learn your competitor's (I won't say opponents') system and outlook?