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(2nd LD) N. Korean soldier defects to South, suffers gunshot wounds from North

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(ATTN: UPDATES from 2nd para)

SEOUL, Nov. 13 (Yonhap) – A North Korean soldier defected to South Korea through the Joint Security Area (JSA) in the Demilitarized Zone, Monday, the Joint Chiefs of Staff said.

He received gunshot wounds to the shoulder and elbow from North Korean forces while defecting. The soldier was airlifted by a United Nations Command helicopter to a hospital for treatment after arriving in South Korea, the military said.

"A North Korean soldier defected from a guard post on the North Korean side of the JSA toward our side at 3:31 p.m.," according to a military official.

After hearing several rounds of gunfire, the South Korean military found him fallen and bleeding on the southern side of the JSA, 25 minutes later, according to the military. He was unarmed and wearing a combat uniform for a low rank, with his identity yet to be found, the military also said.

The JSA is a small strip of land on the border between the Koreas where troops from both sides stand face-to-face.

There was no armed conflict between the two sides, the military said.

"Currently, there are no unusual signs in the North Korean military, but we are increasing alertness against the possibility of North Korean provocations," officials said.

The defection through the JSA marks a very rare case, given that North Korean soldiers stationed on the frontline are reportedly cherry-picked for their loyalty to the North Korean regime.

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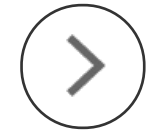
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