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CROSSFIT AT THE DMZ

Fitness and health in South Korea.

BY DANIEL A. ANDERSON

The Korean Demilitarized Zone: No man's land brackets the Military Demarcation Line between North and South Korea.

On July 27, 1953, an armistice put a halt to open hostilities in the Korean War. As part of the Armistice Agreement, the 2.5-mile-wide Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) was created, with the Military Demarcation Line running through its center. The heavily militarized border continues to be a point of conflict in a war without a peace treaty, and the tension between North Korea and South Korea has international repercussions.

The DMZ is a physical barrier between north and south, but it once represented an ideological line between East and West, a remnant of the Cold War. Though the Iron Curtain has fallen, North Korea's nuclear weapons program has created a new flashpoint. After North Korea's first test of nuclear weapons in 2006, a host of countries and international groups imposed sanctions on North Korea, creating increasingly tense relations.

In a small gym about six miles from the DMZ, CrossFit Paju head coach Park Yong Soo helps South Korean citizens, police officers and military personnel "train for the unknown," he said through Google Translate.

Park said many soldiers have improved their physical abilities through functional exercises, which makes them more efficient and agile on missions. As in other parts of the world, CrossFit is perfect for firefighters, law-enforcement agents and soldiers, Park said. But the coach explained he's now seeing evidence that people understand the connection between fitness and health: Doctors and rehab patients are also seeking out CrossFit training.

Chronic disease is a global problem that goes beyond borders and politics. Park said he's looking to help others and wants to be part of the solution: He would like to join a sports-medicine department this year to acquire more specialized knowledge.

Despite the constant tension and uncertainty at the DMZ just a few miles north, Park is certain he wants to help people find health.





Park Yong Soo (left) coaches Lee Young Soo at CrossFit Paju in Paju, South Korea.



Park Yong Soo works out before members arrive to train. Park said interest in CrossFit has spread beyond just soldiers, police officers and firefighters.



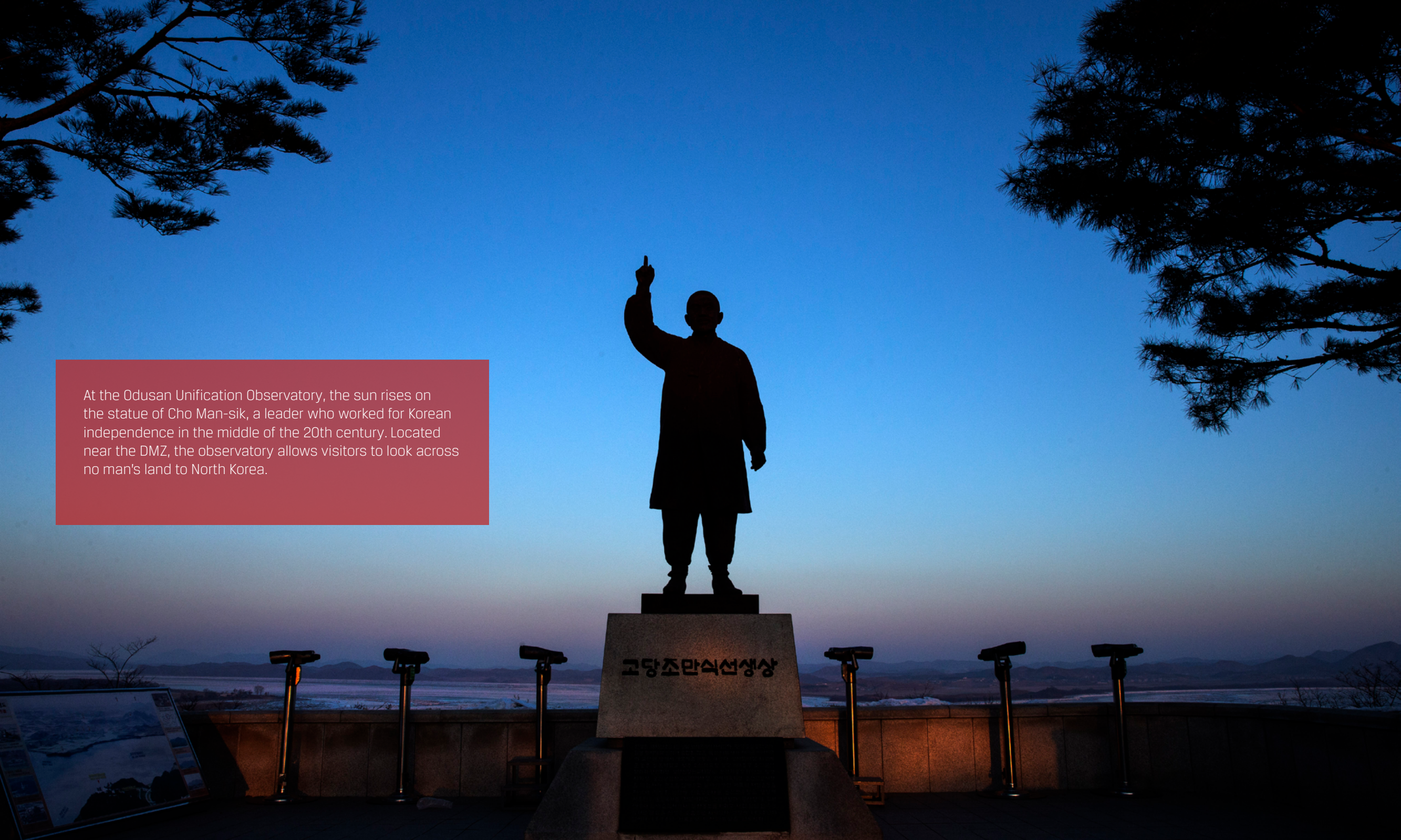
Park Yong Soo in front of the downtown building that houses CrossFit Paju. As you would expect, the city is also home to military bases.



The evolution in Korea mirrors that seen elsewhere in the world: Military and law-enforcement personnel adopt CrossFit, then members of the general population discover functional movement is the key to health.



In the 2013 CrossFit Journal article "Minarets and Muscle-Ups," Bryan Anderson said CrossFit helped athletes in Cairo, Egypt, escape political turmoil. The same is true in South Korea.



At the Odusan Unification Observatory, the sun rises on the statue of Cho Man-sik, a leader who worked for Korean independence in the middle of the 20th century. Located near the DMZ, the observatory allows visitors to look across no man's land to North Korea.

고당조만식선생상

