

You've got Seoul: Vet's spirit buoyed by pen pal

Remembrance Day.

Frank Bayne is still haunted by what he saw during the war but his influence on a young Korean woman's life has helped him find meaning in his suffering



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When Frank Bayne closes his eyes at night, he sees Korea.

He doesn't see the towering skyscrapers of present-day Seoul, or the men and women in suits strolling below, tapping at smartphones bigger than their hands.

What the Guelph, Ont., resident sees are flashbacks of his 14-month service in the final year of Canada's third-bloodiest conflict, the Korean War.

He was manning artillery guns at the peak of Sang Seung observation point, northeast of the South Korean capital in 1953, when, beneath him, in a valley, enemy Chinese soldiers shot his friend Lt. Gerry Meynell in the head and then gunned down another friend, Lt. Doug Banton.

At least 514 other Canadians also lost their lives in the 1950-1953 war.

The lasting effects remain after 60 years for veterans like Bayne.

"My wife says she knows when I'm dreaming because my legs are thrashing around like I'm running," said Bayne.

"In the last year, I had one really, really bad nightmare where she had to wake me up because I was whimpering."

But Bayne, 86, has found a way to deal with his suffering.

He started writing to seven schoolgirls in South Korea about 20 years ago through a partnership created by the Korean Veterans Association of Canada.

One girl, named Choi Jeong-Won, has kept the penpal tradition alive to this day.

As a child, she would write about her life in Korea, her school, and day-to-day goings-on in the life of a typical South Korean teenager.

In her adult life she wrote one time about feeling like she had disgraced her family



Canadian veteran John Stuber receives a hug from Pastor Won Seong-Jae April 26 as dozens of people greeted Korean War veterans at the Busan train station. JOE LOFARO/METRO



Vet Joel Beaman stands next to the Canadian Korean War Monument in Gapyeong. JOE LOFARO/METRO



Korean War veteran Frank Bayne poses with his longtime Korean pen pal Choi Jeong-Won at a restaurant in Seoul in April 2013. CONTRIBUTED

by failing her bar exam for the first time.

"So I wrote her back and said, 'You know, I failed many times and please keep trying,'" said Bayne.

Bayne met her for the first time last April at a Seoul hotel while he was there for a visit organized by Veterans Affairs Canada.

In January, the federal government declared 2013 the Year of the Korean War Veteran and sent 36 vets to mark the 60th anniversary of the Korean War Armistice.

"When we met at the hotel she said that (letter) inspired her to keep on going," said Bayne proudly.

She is now in her early 30s and is a lawyer for a shipping company in Seoul, Bayne said. They've exchanged more than 45 letters.

"I feel that I've contributed to having the country the way it is today; that has

allowed her to do what she's done," said Bayne. "If we hadn't gone there, the whole thing would have been a whole different story."

He has the camaraderie of his fellow veterans, but he said his relationship with Choi puts a human face on the progress South Korea has made in the last 60 years.

On Monday at his home he was preparing to send a new handwritten letter to Choi. Tucked inside the envelope will be a Canadian Remembrance Day coin as a small token of his thanks.

He recalled her gesture of gratitude when she treated him to dinner after their hotel meeting.

En route to the restaurant in a taxi, the driver got out of the cab, bowed to him and thanked him for his service.

"People in the restaurant, again, they all thanked me for saving the country. It was

quite an experience," said Bayne.

Reflecting on his journey back to the bustling metropolis, Bayne said the federal government's declaration of the Year of the Korean War Veteran has helped Canadians remember.

Several people have approached him asking him to speak about the war. This week he was scheduled to speak at a school in Guelph, at the local Royal Canadian Legion, and at a Remembrance Day ceremony.

"In the past, it really was a forgotten war," said Bayne. "And of course it used to make me angry, it used to make quite a few of us angry because people ... always referred to it as the Korean conflict. When somebody would say that I would interrupt and say, 'Well, when I was there, it sure as hell sounded like a war to me.'"

How Canada got involved

25th

The war started on June 25, 1950 when North Korean military forces crossed the 38th parallel into the Republic of Korea.

Other countries

15

Canada joined the war effort in Korea in support of the 15 other United Nations members, including the U.S., Australia, the U.K., and New Zealand, to help defend South Korea.

Quoted

"If we are to avert the danger that threatens the free world, we must marshal in increased resources available to resist aggression."

Canadian prime minister Louis St. Laurent on Aug. 7, 1950.

UN involvement

- The United Nations became the first international organization in history to vote in favour of using force to stop an aggressor.
- In response to the North Korean invasion, Canada recruited an army brigade called the Canadian Army Special Force to assist the UN-led mission.
- At the time, prime minister Louis St. Laurent wanted as close to as many troops as in the Second World War as possible.

Troops

26K

Canada deployed 26,000 troops, eight destroyers, and more than 22 RCAF fighter pilots throughout the three-year war effort in the Korean peninsula.

SOURCE: VETERANS AFFAIRS CANADA, CBC RADIO ARCHIVES



Retired corporal Frank Smyth salutes at the site of the Korean War. JOE LOFARO/METRO



of a gravesite belonging to a Korean War veteran on April 25 at the United Nations Memorial Cemetery in Busan, South Korea.

Senator speaks on what the Korean War means to her

In 1953 an armistice split civil-war-torn Korea in two along the 38th parallel.

Soviet-backed communist North Korea pursued a policy of economic independence and isolationism, and its economy and the welfare of its people has progressively worsened under a succession of totalitarian dictators.

South Korea meanwhile has improved its lot, transferring from a military dictatorship to democratic elections in 1987

and electing its first civilian president in 1993. The country has grown into a high-tech and manufacturing powerhouse with a GDP of \$1.13 trillion US in 2012. It's considered the world's 12th-largest economy.

Canadian Senator Yonah Martin came to Canada in 1972 and is the first woman of Korean descent to be appointed to the Senate.

She says Canada's fight in the Korean war was worth it.

"I would not have been

born, I would not be here today. So I owe my life to those who went to Korea and served," Martin told Metro.

"The Korea today is unrecognizable as everyone knows from the time of the war where Korea was literally the second-poorest country in the world and the Canadian sacrifice has not gone unnoticed. Korea was still a developing country back then and I'm amazed every time I return at what Korea has become." **JOE LOFARO/METRO**

What does Remembrance Day mean to you?



"A day to remember all that they've done for us and

remember that they put their lives out there just so we could live and we could be safe."

Amanda O'Brien, Halifax, Grade 7



"I'm remembering all those people who not just fought but also died or maybe didn't make it in the war."

Keegan Mason, Calgary, Grade 9



"It's a day to remember those who sacrificed their lives in war

for Canada, and remember why they did it."

Miguel Baluyot, 14, Gloucester, Ont., Grade 9

What do you think of Canada's armed forces?



"I think they're amazing and we really need to thank them more."

Emily Kha, Calgary, Grade 9



"They're very successful in protecting us and

keeping us happy and safe."

Emily Konkolus, Edmonton, Grade 6



"We don't want war, so that's why we're decreasing

the level of war and we're increasing the level of love."

Janusan Jeyara, Toronto, Grade 7

with
Remembrance
and
Thanks

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