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# ***Bonds linking the Korean and Australian defence communities***

**Rear Admiral Ian Crawford, AO, AM (Mil), RAN (Ret'd)<sup>1</sup>**

While not often appreciated within the wider community, strong bonds link the defence communities of Korea and Australia. I was reminded of these bonds when the Australian Korean Vietnam Veterans Association invited me to speak at the Association's annual dinner and friendship night recently. For me, who had served in the Korean War of 1950-53 and have enjoyed the recognition of the people and government of Korea for my service, this invitation was a strong reminder of the shared experience of war and the ongoing commitment of Australia and Korea to act against aggression and to support democracy.

## **Shared Wartime Experiences**

Currently, Australia and the Republic of Korea are jointly contributing to the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan; and, in recent times, Republic of Korea forces have been involved in Australia's initiative which became the International Stabilisation Force in East Timor. And, of course, we previously shared a commitment to the Vietnam and Korean Wars.

Last year, at a more personal level, Australians shared with Koreans the sadness at the loss of life in the sinking by torpedo attack of the Republic of Korea Ship *Cheonan*. The Royal Australian Navy was represented in the follow-on inquiry through the International Joint Investigation Group. The location of this attack off Pengyong Do recalled for many of the Royal Australian Navy personnel who served in the Korean War, the use made by West Coast naval forces of the nearby island of Techong Do. After its evacuation by the North Koreans, this island became a base for liaison with South Korean guerrillas and ships of the Republic of Korea Navy. It was also used by destroyers and frigates for shelter when sea conditions prevented their continuing employment on patrol activities.

The official histories of the Royal Navy and the United States Navy record that HMS *Ceylon*, the ship in which I was serving as a midshipman, put a landing party ashore on Techong Do on 29 September 1950, two days after the North Koreans had withdrawn. Extracts from my midshipman's journal entry for 27 September 1950 and later read:

"We left *Kenya* and proceeded to Te Chong To, where we met two ROK (Republic of Korea) vessels in the afternoon. Te Chong To had been evacuated by the Communists and a landing party consisting of Sub-Lieutenant Harvey, the PMO (principal medical officer), the chaplain, Midshipman Baker and a section of marines proceeded ashore to learn what they could of the North Koreans who still held Peng Yong To. The captain decided to send an ultimatum to Peng Yong To threatening them (the North Koreans) with land, sea and air attack if they did not surrender – where the land and air attacks were to come from we were not quite sure."

"As no reply to ultimatum was forthcoming by the thirtieth, we proceeded to shell the batteries on Peng Yong To. Sub-Lieutenant Harvey went inshore in one of the ROK vessels as forward observation officer, with *Cockade* in support. During the bombardment, *Cockade* and the ROK vessel came under fire from the batteries ashore, but all the shots fell wide. The shoot was not satisfactory as no allowance had been made for the tide, which was very strong between the islands. Air spotting was really necessary and consequently we asked the Americans for a spotting aircraft during our next effort."

"Later, when we bombarded again, we placed a dan buoy at a set range from the enemy island and throughout the shoot the navigator kept the ship's bows to the buoy. This effectively counteracted the force of the tide, but little was achieved as the spotting aircraft could see nothing for us to shell. I also wonder what the purpose was of having the chaplain in the landing party, but I have to admit that on many occasions the chaplain found the condition of civilians ashore to be distressing and the ship took measures to relieve those conditions. I was later involved in one of these activities at Techong Do."

## **Servicemen Missing-in-Action in Korea**

In addition to joint military operations, there are ongoing important activities involving Australian veterans and Korean veterans and authorities. The Australian veteran community enjoys helpful communications with the Korean Ministry of National Defence Agency for Killed in Action and Identification (MAKRI). There are 43 Australian soldiers, airmen and sailors still missing-in-action from the Korean War. Since most of them are either in North Korea or in the Demilitarised Zone, the focus of our interest is on the search for the remains of Corporal Murphy, which were not recovered after the Battle of Kapyong; and on the identification of remains of

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<sup>1</sup>Ian Crawford has been a member of the Institute since 1954. The government of the Republic of Korea has recognised his services to Korea by awarding him the Order of Diplomatic Service Merit. This essay is based on his address to the Australian Korean Vietnam Veterans Association on 30 April 2012.

unknown servicemen in cemeteries in Pusan and Hawaii.

### **Korea Revisit Programme**

Korea has established a Revisit Programme and an Ambassador for Peace Medal. These are important to the peace-of-mind of veterans and their families. Responsibility for administering these activities has now passed from the Korean Veterans Association to the Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs. The April 2012 Australian contingent who participated in the Revisit Programme reported that it was an outstanding experience. Sadly, we note that there are still some Australian veterans who have not heard of this programme.

### **War Memorials and Cemeteries**

Memorials and cemeteries are another element of the bonds between our two nations. There have been some modifications made to the Australian National Korean War Memorial on Anzac Parade in Canberra. The purpose of these changes was to give recognition to those who died in the post-armistice period, but the opportunity was also taken to enhance the commemorative purpose of the Australian National Korean War Memorial.

The original design brief for the Canberra memorial envisaged the incorporation of Korean flora in it, based on the recognition that there would be very few family members of those who are buried at the United Nations Memorial Cemetery, Pusan, who would have the opportunity to visit this beautifully maintained cemetery. There are horticultural features of that cemetery, which are moving and expressive of the gratitude of the Korean people. At each grave stone, there is a planting of Korean box (*Buxus microphylla koreana*). Some of these grave sites, particularly those of Australians, have been maintained by Korean women volunteers. At the perimeter to the cemetery are rows of shaped Korean conifers. The proposal for the Canberra memorial was that this Pusan memorial environment should be projected to the Australian National Korean War Memorial to permit family members to experience features of the Pusan setting, which reflect the sentiment of gratitude and respect.

The Canberra memorial includes an obelisk to commemorate those who have no known grave. The wording of the memorial plaque is taken from the engraving on the memorial to those with no known grave at the United Nations Memorial Cemetery, Pusan. The whole effect now links the Australian National Korean War Memorial, Canberra, to the United Nations Memorial Cemetery, Pusan. Such poignant links with the Australian dead in Korea are important to the commemorative purpose of the Canberra memorial and for the focus of grief for families.

### **Memorial plaques at historic sites**

Memorial plaques also have been placed at locations, which are important to commemorate



HMAS *Murchison* in Korean waters c. 1951-52  
[Photo: Wikipedia Commons]

Australia's involvement in the Korean War. Initially, plaques were placed at Kapyong and the United Nations Memorial Cemetery, Pusan. Recently, using surplus funds from the Australian National Korean War Memorial project, three plaques were designed by Dr Ross Bastiaan, AM, of Victoria. They include text in English and hangul and a map of the relevant operation. One is now located at Observation Post 758, overlooking the Han River Estuary, to commemorate HMAS *Murchison's* operation in 1951-52 and, by extension, the Royal Australian Navy's activities in the Korean War. Another is at Observation Post Tai Poong commemorating the battle of Maryang San; and the third is at the Korean National War Memorial commemorating Royal Australian Air Force operations. The Korean National War Memorial is a particularly prestigious location for the Royal Australian Air Force plaque and its placement there was the outcome of discussions between the Australian Embassy, Seoul, and Korean authorities in connection with the commemoration of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the Republic of Korea Air Force. The surplus funds from the Canberra memorial also enabled a contribution to be made to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Royal Australian Regiment Association for a plaque to commemorate the Battle of the Hook which took place in the days before the armistice in July 1953.

### **Conclusion**

The continuing military operations in which Korea and Australia are both engaged, the ongoing contacts and fellowship among veterans, and the cemeteries and memorials in the two countries, all attest to the strength of the bonds which link our two defence communities. There is, however, still work to be done to achieve the proposal of Mrs Olwyn Green<sup>3</sup> that 27 July should be recognised as International Korean War Veterans' Day. Overtures have been made to the Australian government to give effect to this proposal.

<sup>3</sup>Mrs Olwyn Green, OAM, widow of Lieutenant Colonel C. H. ("Charlie") Green, commanding officer of 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, who died of wounds in Korea, is a member of the Institute.