

Tour News

Revisit Korea

By Bob Mount

During the period of 21 June 2008 - 26 June 2008 I was a guest of The Sae Eden Presbyterian Church of Seoul, Korea for a revisit trip. I consider it an honor to have been one of 20 selected from the many applicants and I appreciate this opportunity. After all, I was just a common GI with only my service in Korea from July 1950 to August 1951 as a combat engineer, and no acts of heroism, to recommend me.



Leo and Michael Ruffing in Korea

Let me tell you about the church and the Korean people. They treated us veterans to the best hotel, the best food, and some of the most solemn ceremonies their country has to offer. This is a large church with a sanctuary that seats 5,000. In every way possible they made us feel welcome and appreciated. They honored us with so many “thanks to you” speeches I could not count them all.

Our first event was a “Service to promote the Friendship & Relationship between ROK and USA” at the church. For our entry, their walkway into the church was lined on each side with the little children of the church. All their choirs with their accompaniment were in full voice, and the sanctuary, filled to capacity, erupted in thunderous applause as we walked down the center aisle (led by the American flag). To say this was an emotional moment is a gigantic understatement.

RIGHT: A picture of serenity at the anything-but-serene DMZ



ABOVE: Leo Ruffing and MajGen George Edwards, USAF (Ret) pay respects after placing a wreath at the War Memorial along the DMZ on the border of North/South Korea

RIGHT: Leo and Michael Ruffing at the Bridge of No Return, where the POW crossed from captivity to Freedom, in Korea



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After many speeches, each giving thanks for the veterans who saved their country, there was a banquet in their social hall, which had been prepared in their church kitchen. During the meal we were treated to a performance of traditional Korean music.

During our stay we were taken to the DMZ and toured the negotiating facilities, visited the Martyrdom Cemetery (where we placed a wreath on two grave sites, one holding the US missionary who was the first to bring the Bible to Korea), had lunch at the mess hall of the 1st Division of the ROK army (where the band was out in full dress for our arrival and departure), placed a wreath at the National Memorial Cemetery (equal to our Arlington National Cemetery), and attended a reception for veterans hosted by the President of the Republic of South Korea.

We also witnessed a celebration at the Gang-Chung Gym (used for gymnastics during the Olympics), where there were many floor presentations of traditional Korean music and formations. There were many other events; these are just some of the highlights.

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The first occurred at the Seoul Tower. When a group of visiting school children learned we were veterans, they crowded around us, anxious to have their picture taken with a veteran. The second was at the Gang-Chung Gym. There, a group of touring college students had marched on the floor. Upon learning there were US veterans present, they asked if one of us could come out to meet them. I was selected and went out for greetings and photos with them.

South Korea is a newly developed, modern country with all the congestion and crowded highways of any large urban area. Their economy is the 10th strongest in the world, and they did it all in the last 50 years. It is wonderful what free people can do.

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NOTE: KWVA Chaplain Leo Ruffing was on the same trip. He submitted the photos that accompany this article.