

The 1st Peace Camp for Youth - Celebrating 59 years of Friendship since the Korean War

On the 1st July this year 115 youths from the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Thailand, Korea, Australia, Canada and Colombia gathered in Busan for the opening of the 1st Peace Camp for Youth. We were greeted at the airport by a very friendly member of the South Korean Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs who bought us a very expensive meal in the airport and then escorted us to our buses which took us to the hostel. The hostel in which we stayed seemed more like a 4 star hotel to me and the food offered was very interesting but also very delicious. On our first morning in Busan we had an orientation ceremony in the Nurimaru APEC house. We listened to a very touching speech by the Minister of the Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs in which he said, regarding our grandparents, *"Their efforts, blood, sweat and tears laid the foundation for modern-day Korea. Their bravery and commitment bore out in the extreme dangers of terrible war. They risked their lives. I would like to ask all of you to remember the legacy your ancestors have handed down through their blood: freedom is not free."* It was with this impacting realisation that we started the Camp. Most of us now looked upon the Camp as an opportunity to learn more about the sacrifices our grandparents had made rather than just a chance to have fun.

After lunch at a traditional Korean restaurant we travelled to the UN Memorial Cemetery and took part in the laying of a wreath donated by the Ministry of Patriots and Veteran Affairs. After the ceremony we were free to walk around the cemetery and pay our respects to loved ones or family members who had died in the war. I took this opportunity to lay a wreath of poppies at the Wall of Remembrance on which were inscribed the names of Royal Marines who gave their lives during the Korean War but whose graves are unknown. The wreath was sent to me by my Grandfather, Peter Thomas, who was a Royal Marine Lieutenant in the Korean War.



The wreath bears the motto *"Per Mare Per Terrain"* - By Sea By Land. The wording on the message card affixed to the wreath reads: **IN MEMORY OF THE 31 ROYAL NAVY AND ROYAL MARINES OF 41 INDEPENDENT COMMANDO WHO WERE KILLED IN ACTION, DIED OF WOUNDS OR IN CAPTIVITY.**



I found this experience incredibly moving and I thought it an honour to lay a wreath in remembrance of these courageous men who willingly sacrificed their lives on behalf of South Korea.

After leaving the cemetery we were transported back to our hostel where we listened to a lecture on the Korean War and its historical meaning by the Professor of the Military Academy. It was interesting to learn about the different tactics used in the war and about where the division between North and South Korea was drawn.

Later on in the camp we went to the POW camps, to the national cemetery and also to the Demilitarized Zone. The tour of the Demilitarized Zone was particularly interesting because they showed us one out of 4 tunnels they have found that was dug by the North Koreans and led into South Korea. It was a little unnerving to find out that there were 40 more suspected tunnels. During our stay in South Korea, we were taken to cultural restaurants and performances and we even learned how to make Korean good-luck charms. My experience in Korea was exhilarating because I had the opportunity to experience a completely new culture in which you could see the stark contrast between new and old. We were all incredibly well looked-after, with incredible meals and sights to see. The main thing that I have gained from this Peace Camp is a deeper understanding of the sacrifices made by my grandfather and his family and countless others and their families.

Esther Thomas

