

A Korean War Vet Remembers

By Wilson M. Powell, July 2023

It was on July 27, 1953. Along with about a hundred other men, I was glad to board a plane that was to take me on the first leg of a journey back to the United States.

I was leaving Korea with a raw mix of emotions. For one thing, I was leaving my war dog, Bodo, who had protected me, saved my life many times on countless night patrols at the edge of enemy territory. I was also leaving a group of children in an orphanage I had something to do with establishing with the assistance of my family back in California.

In my time in Korea I had encountered extreme brutality, which found an echo in my own nature, to my shame. But then I found a very generous human spirit in the shape of a little boy who led me to an old farming couple who were taking in wandering children they could not afford to support. By asking me to build and supply the orphanage, this little boy and the old couple helped me to regain my humanity.

When I was traveling in China with a group of railroaders in 1983, I met a Chinese man who had fought in the Korean War of 1950-53 as part of the voluntary Chinese soldiers. Ming-Fu, like me, suffered great distress over the Korean orphans from the war. He spoke English, thanks to an education he received during the World War II from a Methodist missionary. We became fast friends. He visited me in the States. I last saw him in the year 2000 in Chengdu, China. He was a much diminished man, having attempted suicide after the Cultural Revolution.

I met Ming-Fu's children, including his daughter, Zhou Ying, who wanted to improve her English. Together we found a Chinese-English dictionary which I bought for her. A 23-year correspondence has ensued. When her father died in 2002, she declared herself my daughter. I have introduced her to my own children and the familial bonds were established.

I write all this because it is a story of the essential humanity that exists between peoples all over the globe. It is this essential humanity that needs to be recognized by our leaders. If they could feel what I feel for the people of Korea and China, perhaps they would reach out a hand of peace to the other side and be less inclined to rattle their weapons or engage in their war games that would provoke one more war.

Some seventy years ago, we were sent to fight an unnecessary war in a distant, strange land because of an irrational fear of communism. I was glad to get out of there when a temporary ceasefire was signed in Korea. However, it is very regretful that we have failed so far to end the long Forgotten War officially. Where is the will to replace the outdated, shaky Armistice with a peace treaty today?

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