

The Korean War Veteran

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The great General Paik, Hero of Korea, receives his cane from Canadian veteran

If you ever see General Paik Sun Yup mentioned on an official program or in the news media in Korea he invariably is identified as “The Hero of Korea.”

It is an honour not misplaced, and certainly one that was hard earned.

When North Korean armoured forces crossed into South Korea in June, 1950, Brigadier General Paik Sun Yup was an agile 31-year old divisional commander. His Republic of Korea Army 1st Division was defending the west central and west front, which means Seoul and well north of the city as well.

His brigades, battalions fought hard along the Imjin and outside of Seoul, but they were lightly armed. The American forces that had occupied Korea until that year had equipped them only with small arms and light support weapons. They had no tanks, no medium or heavy artillery.

It was thought that an army light on support weapons would be less likely to cross into North Korea and wage war to try to consolidate the country under the rule of the South Korean president. The American forces had left. Only a few American advisory officers remained in the country.

General Paik scrambled, trying to locate and deploy this unit and that.

In Seoul he put together a large formation out of scattered units and their column came under attack by American fighter planes sent over from Japan.

Many of his officers panicked and were for giving up.

The young general rallied them smiling and shouting.



“This is wonderful! They only attacked us because they thought we were North Koreans. This means the American air force is going to fight on our side.”

His troops fought a rear guard withdrawing action and finally consolidated on the east flank of American forces along the Naktong River, in what was called the Pusan Perimeter.

In September - synchronized with the seaborne invasion at Incheon by the U.S. X Corps, comprised of the 1st Marine Division and 7th U.S. Infantry Division, supported by ROK marines and a ROK Army Division - General Paik's 1st Division launched its breakout counterattacks on a wide front.

While briefing his officers he gave them a stern order. He said that if any one of them ever saw him with his back to the enemy he was to shoot him dead immediately. He said he expected the same conduct and discipline from all of them.



Brigadier General Paik Sun-yup discusses an operation with U.S. I Corps commander Major General Frank W. Milburn, after entering Pyongyang on Oct. 19, 1950. General Paik's 1st Division entered the North Korean capital victoriously and the North Korean forces were defeated in the field. Only the massive intervention of the Chinese Peoples Volunteers stopped the combined advance of United Nations forces. On the far eastern side of North Korea, Republic of Korea troops advanced to the Yalu River itself. However, to their west slightly, X Corps of the United Nations forces ran into huge concentrations of Chinese troops and fought desperate battles in and near the Nanjing (Chosin) Reservoir. On the western side of North Korea the U.S. 8th Army with units attached, including Republic of Korea forces, was pushed back below the Imjin River with devastating losses.

General Paik represented South Korea as a delegate on the United Nations Command negotiating team during the first round of armistice talks in July, 1951.



After his promotion on merit, Major General Paik Sun Yup and U.S. senior delegates are shown ready to board helicopter to participate in first round of armistice talks with Chinese representatives at Kaesong, 10 July, 1951. From left: Rear Admiral Arleigh A. Burke, U.S. Navy; Major General Laurence C. Cragie, U.S. Air Force; Major General Paik; Vice Admiral C. Turner Joy, U.S. Navy (the chief delegate) and General Matthew B. Ridgway, commander in chief United Nations Forces.

He was later promoted to four star general and the ROK Army Chief of Staff. After the fighting ended he was named Korea's first ever chief of the combined staffs.

Thereafter General Paik was appointed Korea's ambassador to a number of countries. He was Korea's first Ambassador to Canada.

He speaks English comfortably and fluently, along with Korean, Japanese and French.

General Paik was an honoured guest last November at a ceremony in Seoul hosted by His Excellency David Chatterton, Canada's Ambassador to Korea.

The ceremony involved presentation of an original commemorative painting to the War Memorial of Korea, to be displayed in perpetuity for the People of Korea.

It was painted by Canadian artist Ted Zuber and presented to the president of the War Memorial by a Canadian veteran, Lieutenant Colonel James Duncan. Jim Duncan had served in Korea as a young officer.



Lieutenant Colonel James Duncan, OMM, CD, speaking at presentation of veterans commemorative painting at the War Memorial of Korea in November, 2012. Colonel Duncan joined the Canadian Army as a boy soldier at age 17 with the rank of “Boy,” served in Korea as a lieutenant with the Royal Canadian Army Service Corps and retired as a distinguished lieutenant

colonel. He made the official presentation of the painting to the president of the War Memorial of Korea, with Canada's Ambassador David Chatterson hosting and officiating.

During his presentation remarks, Colonel Duncan acknowledged General Paik's presence and personally saluted him.

After the painting was unveiled, General Paik came over to Colonel Duncan to chat with him. It seemed that he greatly admired Jim's hand carved cane and offered to swap his own with him.

Jim needs his cane to offset a disability and is comfortably attached to it so he declined, but he promised he would try to find the craftsman who made it and have one carved for General Paik.

Colonel Duncan became very sick while in Korea. When he returned to the extended care facility where he lives in Penticton, British Columbia, Canada, he was put in isolation for more than one week.



Lieutenant Colonel James Duncan with hand carved cane prior to having it wrapped and shipped to Korea. Jim wears his British Columbia Wildlife Federation jacket. Though legally blind he travels alone independently, although he walks only short distances.

He eventually recovered and at once set out to locate the cane carver. The carver located a limb of British Columbia hardwood that was very close in configuration to Jim's own cane and set to work carving it by hand.

Jim had it affixed with a gold metal band with General Paik's name on it and some words of admiration.

He shipped it off to Seoul and the Canadian Defence Attache, Colonel Jacques Morneau arranged a very successful meeting with General Paik.



General Paik Sun Yup receives the hand carved cane from Colonel Jacques Morneau, the Canadian Defence Attache in Seoul. Colonel Morneau has met with General Paik on many occasions. Behind them is General Paik's favourite and cherished painting showing him meeting with General Douglas MacArthur during the Korean War. It is noteworthy that to the left of General Paik on the credenza beneath the painting is a miniature bronze of the Monument to Canadian Fallen that stands in the United Nations

Memorial Cemetery in Busan. A fullscale copy of the monument also is sited in Ottawa.

The General not only accepted it with sincerity, he began using it at once.

A short story perhaps of little consequence to those who did not serve in the Korean War and do not know the strong bond between all those who did.



Chatting over coffee, General Paik presented Colonel Morneau with a copy of his biography and discussed some of the highlights of a noble military and diplomatic career. He twice was awarded the Taeguk, the highest medal for valour in the Republic of Korea. General Paik is now 93.

General Paik has said many times that he enjoyed his service in Canada while Ambassador, and he has said that he preferred Canada to France; he was also the Republic of Korea's Ambassador to France.

It is noteworthy that on the credenza behind his desk, below the painting that he treasures that shows him greeting General Douglas MacArthur beside MacArthur's plane, "Bataan," General Paik keeps a small bronze miniature of the Monument to

Canadian Fallen that stands in the United Nations Memorial Cemetery in Busan. A duplicate of the monument also located in Canada's capital.



This year, 2013, is The Year of Korea in Canada and in Korea it is designated The Year of Canada in Korea.

To we veterans, it is much more than words.

The cane presented to General Paik is much more than a cane.