

Korean War Veterans Memorial Service – 27 July 2015

Korean War and other Veterans, Serving women and men of the Australian Defence Force, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

People passed to and fro, occasionally stopping to stare up or down or straight in front of them. The names stood 'proud' of the bronze plaques, row after row.

Sprigs of rosemary and black buttoned red poppies were pressed against the names, row after row – they reached out to signal a loved one or a friend had passed; a mark of respect to those who had given the ultimate sacrifice for their country.

A little later a group of school children accompanied by a teacher and two parents stopped nearby. The teacher asked the students to select a name on the bronze panel before them – a name selected at random from the alphabetical listing of Aussie's who had died during the Korean War.

I listened as the teacher spoke briefly about the death of her Uncle, his name stood 'proud' of the bronze plaque as her fingers glided over the letters that spelt out his name.

She said today we are going to learn how and why these men died for their country.

I looked further down the walkway lined with those bronze plaques; a sturdy looking gentlemen made his way towards us announcing his arrival with a hearty; good morning.

He spoke briefly with the teacher before turning to the students and starting his well-rehearsed presentation on the Korean War.

I moved a little closer; there was something for all of us in what he had to say.

I listened intently, turning my attention to the children occasionally, their eyes full of inquisitiveness, as the sturdy gentlemen's storytelling captured our attention.

Then came the questions, one after another from the 10 year olds. The teacher listened as I and several others who had stopped took in the richness of the knowledge brought forth by this sturdy gentleman.

There was a round of applause and the entourage moved further down the walkway.

Ladies and gentlemen;

At 10.00pm on 27 July 1953 the battlefields of Korea fell silent.

Earlier that day an armistice had been signed between the United Nations and China and North Korea.

Negotiations had taken two years.

Both armies withdrew from their final lines to create a 4 kilometre wide "Demilitarised Zone".

Governed by strict rules, it remains in place today, not far from the 38th Parallel where the war began.

Both sides maintain an uneasy vigil behind thick wire fences.

A peace treaty has never been signed and Korea lives on a war footing, no closer to unification than in 1950 – 65 years on.

From my perspective, those who made the ultimate sacrifice can rest in comfort knowing that school children, in particular, will continue to stop, to listen, to inquire, to research, to write their interpretation of what they experience when they visit the

Australian War Memorial or indeed any of the hundreds of monuments and memorials that stand tall in our communities.

We owe those that have fallen and those who have returned to our shores our utmost respect and all that follow in their footsteps – their story needs to be told -

Lest we forget.