

Revisit Korea Program

As a family member of a POW of the Korean War, Laura Platt, formerly of LeRoy but residing in Byron received information of the upcoming Revisit Korea Program. Platt's great uncle, Sgt. Otis (Bus) Loomis, was her mother's favorite uncle and she had always known of his sacrifice and her mom's heartbreak that he never returned home from the war. Over the past 15 years or more, there has been an outreach program sponsored by the federal government that continues to keep families of MIA/POW informed of efforts to recover and repatriate the remains of their family members and also to reinforce the fact that these brave service people who gave their all will never be forgotten. Several members of Platt's family have attended these gatherings over the years on behalf of Sgt. Loomis, but here was an opportunity to have Loomis' family return to Korea and see first-hand how the United States changed the fate of South Korea.

Laura Platt and her husband, Doug, filled out the required documents and prepared for a 16-hour flight to Soule, South Korea. The 2018 program ran from April 23 – 28 and was developed by the MPVA Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs. This was the 3rd year of the Heroes Remembered Program. As part of the program, the agency paid half of Platt's flight, and her husband's flight cost was discounted by 30%.

The Platts were greeted at the Seoul airport as were the other 49 American family members representing 24 fallen US military win attendance. The group posed for a photo before leaving the airport. When they reached the hotel, they found two large ice sculptures of eagles in the main foyer. Each family member was given a rose and escorted through a welcoming path with applause and more photos. Each family was assigned a Korean representative that helped them throughout their stay. The Koreans were starting a photo and video diary that

would be given to each family at the end of their stay. Platt said that the Korean people were so gracious and welcoming. "We were treated like royalty," Platt said.

The group was taken by bus to their hotel. They were given some time to refresh and were then gathered for dinner. At dinner each person received a name badge and a booklet that included their itinerary.

Over the next days the Koreans escorted the group as they traveled by deluxe motor coach to tour many of the historic and notable venues. They learned all about the Korean War, it's devastating impact on South Korea. Many Koreans shared their traumatic first-hand experiences during the war. The Platts got to know the other Americans and their stories of how that war impacted their family. There was a brother in his late 80s there for his lost brother, a 92-year-old wife there for her lost husband, many children of fathers who were killed in Korea. Most of the family members were nieces and nephews as most of the fallen were very young men and not married.

The Koreans brought the group to several cemeteries and monuments commemorating the war. Plaques that contained the names of all foreign soldiers lost in the war covered the walls of a large room. The names of the Americans were organized alphabetically by state. In addition to the US, many other countries sent aid and troops during the war. However, Platt remarked that the list of the Americans from NY and PA was longer than the listing of the fallen from all other countries put together. According to Platt there were over 36,000 Americans killed in action during the Korean Conflict and to date, along with her uncle, there are still 7800 "missing in action," their bodies have not been identified or recovered. The efforts to do so are progressing slowly, and with family DNA they are continuing to ID the remains.

Platt remarked that they were busy every single day. Korean TV and news reporters were on hand to highlight the event in their local the news. The group was also entertained by the Koreans through song, dance and Kung Fu demonstrations. They were even invited to dress in their native costumes which all were happy to do; a colorful group photo was then taken. There were ceremonies where each family's fallen service person was recognized and honored.

Platt remarked that her knowledge of the Korean War was only a paragraph or two in her high school history book. Now she learned how the country was leveled during the war. The buildings were leveled and there was not a tree left on the mountains. Nearly every wild animal was wiped out, too. There were only 2 bridges over the Huang River during the war! Today there are 32 and more in the planning. A friend of the Platt's told them that when he was in Korea in 1960 there were only dirt roads! Today Korea is thriving and a major player in the economy of the world.

Of all the ceremonies the most meaningful one performed was where the South Korean soldiers presented an 8 x 10 canvas photo of our loved one. It was held in front of the American monument for the United States Armed Forces in the Korean War, Gapyeong County. The monument was a giant American flag made of concrete. It was created by Minister PI Woo-Jiin of MVPA.

The most surprising fact about the trip according to Platt was just how thankful the people of South Korea are towards Americans, from students to the elderly. "We saved their freedom," Platt said. "A young student walked up to my husband and said, we love Americans."

When asked what was the most significant happening during the time in South Korea, Platt said, "We were there during the historic Summit between North and South Korea. There were TV reporters everywhere



and some areas were closed down for security. History was being made and we were within miles of where it happened." One member of each family was awarded the Ambassador of Peace on behalf of the service that their countrymen have performed in restoring and preserving the freedom and democracy of South Korea. Platt continued, "It was presented to Douglas Platt on April 27, 2018, the very day of the Summit."

The Platts decided to make a stop in Bangkok, Thailand before heading back home to visit their former exchange student, Ramitar Burasai (Rita). Over the years the Platts have hosted many exchange students. Rita and a girl from Germany spent a school year with them and joined their daughter, Tiffanie, at Byron-Bergen High School about seven years ago.

Rita's mom, dad and sister enjoyed reciprocating the hospitality of her American host family. They took time out of their schedules to tour the Platts all around Bangkok and the surrounding area teaching them about the history and customs of their country and showing them many historical sites. The Platts enjoyed reconnecting with Rita and getting to know her family. They found the people of Thailand very friendly and helpful and really loved the food. The Platts said their trip to Asia was an unexpected but wonderful experience.