



U.S. veteran, Buddy Blair was recently honored by South Korea for serving in the Korean War

ANDREW V. "BUDDY" BLAIR
Past President
TEXAS LONE STAR CHAPTER
KOREAN WAR VETERANS



Return to Korea

Sugar Land Korean War Veteran Receives Honors in South Korea

Written by Crystal Rawls Select Photography by Jason Louie

When Buddy Blair came home from Korea in March 1952, there were no parades, yellow ribbons, or welcome home banners to greet him. Recently, this former Korean War soldier stepped back in time to re-visit the people, places, and memories he left behind.

Sixty years have passed since Blair last stood on Korean soil as a U.S. soldier in combat, but his memories from the “Forgotten War” are very real and very vivid. In 2009, Blair and his wife, Billie, accepted an invitation from the South Korean government to visit the country. “I’d wanted to go for a long time,” he says. And he’s glad he did, as his second experience in the once war-torn nation proved to him his efforts overseas all those years ago hadn’t been futile.

Receiving a Nation’s Gratitude

For two weeks, the Blairs traveled the country, from Seoul to the Korean demilitarized zone, the invasion tunnels, Busan, and the American National Cemetery. “It’s fantastic now,” Buddy says. “When I left (in 1952), there wasn’t anything but mud huts.” On their last night in South Korea, they attended a ceremony where Buddy received the Ambassador for Peace medal.

Since 1975, the South Korean government has provided subsidized visits for Korean War veterans and their family members through the Revisit Korea program. By paying for hotel rooms, meals, and in-country tours, the South Koreans express their thanks to the allied servicemen for their sacrifices in saving their country from communism.

Gratitude seems too small a word to describe the honor South Koreans place on Korean War veterans. “We wore nametags around our necks, so they knew who we were,” says Blair. “People would put their hands together and nod and say, ‘Thank you for saving our country.’”

Fighting for the People of South Korea

Blair joined the U.S. Air Force in 1948, just three years after the U.S. declared a victorious end to World War II. Soon after receiving his basic training in aircraft and engine maintenance, Blair was sent to the Philippines. “I was in the Philippines when the war broke out,” he says. “It wasn’t but a couple [of] months before I was sent (to Korea) with the 35th Fighter Interceptor Wing.”

Blair noticed the difficulty the Koreans faced in fighting to keep their country. “When the war first started, the Koreans were not well prepared,” he remembers. “They were (untrained) and the equipment was outdated.” Stationed at Yonpo, an air field located near the Manchurian border in what is now North Korea, Blair worked to unload planes delivering patients and casualties from the front lines to relative safety.



Buddy Blair joined the U.S. Air Force in 1948

“While at Yonpo, I had to spend one night in the foxhole,” says Blair, who was armed with a 30-caliber carbine. “It was 40 degrees below zero and the shelter hatch froze to the ground during the night. But we had to stay there, because we thought the Chinese were going to break through the ranks. The next morning, Hamhung Harbor was evacuated on LSTs (Landing Ship, Tanks). The Marines were blowing up the bridges behind us, so the Chinese wouldn’t follow.”

Following the evacuation, Blair was re-assigned to the 6147th Maintenance and Supply Squadron in Busan, South Korea. He manned major inspections of the T-6 Texan single-engine trainer planes. “It was a two-seater aircraft, one in front and one in back,” says Blair. “When used in combat, the pilot was in the front and the ground

observer in the back. Six phosphorus rockets were under the wings. (The planes) shot the rockets and marked the target for the bombers to come behind.”

Coming Back Home

After 22 months in Korea, Blair finally returned to the U.S. However, his and other Korean veterans’ return home was not as jubilant as expected. “When I came home, nobody even knew I’d been gone,” he says. “It was called the ‘Korean Police Action.’ I never saw police the whole time I was there... Just in the last few years, Congress admitted it was a war. It was the first time the Communists were ever stopped.”

Helping Make a Difference

Prior to his discharge from the air force in 1952, Blair achieved the rank of staff sergeant. He then worked at Imperial Sugar for 40 years as an engineering draftsman. The time he spent in Korea in the early 1950s was, perhaps, the most difficult two years of Buddy’s life. In fact, tears fill his eyes at the thought of fallen comrades some 60 years later. But because of his willingness to serve, Blair brought freedom to millions. **SLM**

CRYSTAL RAWLS is a technical writer at Fluor Corporation.