

Korean War Veteran

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Canada's Senator Yonah Martin, other dignitaries, pay homage to Veterans at Battle of Kapyong Remembrance Services



The insignia of the Korea Veterans Association of Canada

While ceremonies marking the 64th anniversary of Canadian participation in the April, 1951 Battle of Kapyong honour all Korean War Veterans, and are held in tribute to their Korean War service and achievements, it is sometimes good to note those among us who have worked tirelessly to organize and manage such programs, although by choice they may stay in the inconspicuous sidelines and appear only as is essential.

It is safe to say, although saying safe things is not the style of this publication, that nobody in the Canadian Government supports Canada's Korean War Veterans more than Senator Yonah Martin, Deputy Government Leader of the Canadian Senate.

With Senator Martin, it is not a duty or a job, but a personal conviction that the veterans need to be honoured for what they did so long ago when they served in Korea.

She has said, over and over again, in Canada and in Korea and in the United States, that but for those veterans, she would not be in Canada now; that she feels she owes her very life to them.

Her list of achievements on behalf of Canada's Korean War Veterans has been monumental, and that is a good word to use, for what she has done is indeed a living memorial to all of them.

Early on in her now seven-years of service as a Canadian Senator, she brought her fellow senators and MPs in Parliament, and Korean community leaders in principal cities across Canada into her sweeping plans to honour and commemorate the veterans.

Born in Korea, she came to Canada with her parents at age seven, and landed in Canada without being able to speak any English. Later, as a teacher with a master's degree in the language, she would teach it for many years at high schools in British Columbia.

One of her early moves on behalf of the veterans focused on a single battle in Korea; one which is well known in the veteran community but which needs to be commemorated and not forgotten.

There were many battles in Korea, of course, and a majority of Canada's Korean War Veterans did not serve in the Battle of Kapyong in April, 1951, but it is testimony to the sacrifice, bravery and service of all of them – whether in service on land, or at sea or in the air.

So one of her early achievements was to organize a national Kapyong memorial day in the national capital. She reached out and partnered with the National Capital Unit of the Korea Veterans Association of Canada, Korea's Ambassador to Canada, Veterans Affairs Canada, the Department of National Defence and the Korean community, and held a splendid commemoration service in Ottawa.

This annual event was held once again last Thursday on April 23, which was 64 years to the day that large enemy forces attacked the 2nd Battalion of Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry at its four principal positions on the western side of the Kapyong River Valley, a few miles from the small city of Kapyong. The Canadians prevailed and did not give up one inch of ground.

Once again, Senator Martin was fully immersed in the Ottawa ceremony, although she was having an extremely busy week in the Senate, which is usual for her, but last week it had been intensified by the government's tabling of the national budget for 2015-2016 on April 21.



So here she is in Ottawa on April 23 on the anniversary of the Battle of Kapyong, at the special ceremony hosted by the Korean Embassy, the National Capital Unit of KVA Canada, the Department of National Defence and Veterans Affairs Canada.

The service was participated in by diplomats, including defence attaches, from Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States, and by Battle of Kapyong Veterans and many serving soldiers from the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry Regiment.

To Senator Martin's right the photograph shows veteran Bill Berry, who is sergeant at arms of the KVA Canada National Capital Unit. Mr. Berry served as a private in the Battle of Kapyong and retired years later as a major. To his right is Veteran Ron Bourgon, who also served as a private in the Battle of Kapyong, but after returning to Canada became a prominent lawyer.

On Mr. Bourgon's right is In Kyu Park, Minister and Charge d'affaires at the Republic of Korea Embassy in Ottawa.

Honourable Yonah Martin, Deputy Government Leader of the Canadian Senate, represented Minister of Veterans Affairs Erin O'Toole, who could not be present, and also participated in the ceremony and follow-on reception in her own right.

Senator Martin remarks that, "It was a crisp, sunny day and the sound of the bugle and pipes were especially emotive. Passersby paused to join the ceremony.

"After the wreaths were laid people were invited to place their poppies on any of the wreaths, which they did with sincerity and solemnity.

"There were 14 current serving PPCLI (Princess Patricias) alongside three Kapyong veterans, which was a sight to see."



And here is one view of the sight she describes.

Fourteen serving soldiers with the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry join Kapyong veteran Ron Bourgon and Major (Ret'd) Bill Berry for a group photo at the Monument to Canadian Fallen. Major Berry was a private at the Battle of Kapyong, but was commissioned and had a career in the Canadian Army. After service with the Special Force 2nd Battalion in Korea Mr. Bourgon was a prominent barrister and attorney at law in Ontario for many years.

The serving soldiers are stationed in various capacities in Ottawa and vicinity. The two lines of tile that run from the base of the monument seem to diverge, but actually they converge into a compass point several meters out. The compass point and the face of the central figure on the monument look along a geographer's Great

Circle plot to the United Nations Memorial Cemetery in Busan, Korea, where an identical monument is located.



Also participating in the ceremony were many veterans from the National Capital Unit of the Korea Veterans Association of Canada, including those who had served in Korea in other battalions of the Patricia's, and others who served in the Royal Canadian Regiment, the Royal 22e Regiment, Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians), Royal Canadian Horse Artillery, Royal Canadian Artillery, other units, and the Royal Canadian Navy. Veteran Ron Bourgon is standing between the standards of KVA Canada and the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry Regiment.

In front of them is LtCmdr. (Ret'd) Bill Black, president of the KVA Canada National Capital Unit and one of the busiest veterans in the world. He organizes and manages many of the ceremonies held in Ottawa that involve KVA Canada and has a very active program caring for and supporting veterans in long term care facilities, as well as liaising with Veterans Affairs Canada and the Republic of Korea's Embassy in Ottawa.



At a follow-on reception at the Lord Elgin Hotel, which is one block away from the Monument to Canadian Fallen and a few steps from the Ottawa offices of Veterans Affairs Canada, all of the veterans, serving soldiers, diplomats and other special guests mingled and discussed that 64 years ago, Canada had soldiers, sailors and airmen fighting in a war in Korea, the first time the United Nations was put to the test and responded with armed force to repel an aggressor from one of the nations that was under its care.

Now that nation, one of the most technologically advanced and economically prosperous in the world, is testimony to the resolve of the various nations that sent their sons and daughters to war in Korea, to fulfill the principles of the Charter of the United Nations that hold the security of all free nations as paramount.

The Republic of Korea today is itself testimony to the service and sacrifice of those hundreds of thousands who served, including 26,000 from Canada, and is living and growing testimony to all of them – although for decades for the most part their own countries and their own fellow citizens ignored them and deprived them of the recognition that was their due.

The reception was hosted by the Embassy of the Republic of Korea.



Here in the Lord Elgin Hotel, the reception host, In Kyu Park, Minister and Charge d'affaires at the Republic of Korea Embassy, welcomes everyone. He registers his nation's appreciation and lasting remembrance for all who served in the Korean War and brought freedom to his country, thereby providing the peace and security that has enabled it to advance to become one of the leading technological and economic powerhouses in the world.



And Senator Yonah Martin, Deputy Government Leader of the Canadian Senate, also warmly welcomed all of the celebrants, in her own right and also on behalf of Veterans Affairs Minister Erin O'Toole, whom she represented.

There was more work to do in her Senate Office and it would be a very long day for her – not unusual – for she would fly to Vancouver at day's end to prepare for another Kapyong remembrance service in her home province.

She would depart Ottawa at 8:30 p.m., with a two-hour layover in Toronto and arrive in Vancouver on Friday at 2:30 a.m. local time.

Did she sleep once she drove to her home? Unlikely, because she left her house by 5:30 a.m. to catch the earliest 6:30 a.m. ferry to Vancouver Island.

Her assistant, Linna Song, arose at 3:30 a.m. to make her way from her home in Langley to Vancouver, not arriving back home until 10:30 p.m. that night.

Here is what Senator Martin had to say about the two days of commemorative functions and her unwavering commitment to be involved in them:

"Though it was a 'long' trek, I am reminded of the Cape Bretoners who traveled by train for 30 days across Canada to get aboard a ship in Seattle to then travel nearly three weeks to get to Korea to defend my parents and the Republic of Korea. So, what we did is the least we can do for the freedoms we enjoy today, thanks to all those who served and sacrificed in the Korean War."

Magnificent gesture.



Senator Martin and her assistant Linna Song enjoy a moment on the rocky shores of the Pacific Ocean on beautiful Vancouver Island.

It is noteworthy that while the services were being held in Canada, veterans participating in the Commonwealth Revisit to Korea also were holding commemorative services in Korea.

The Australian and New Zealand veterans held services at their respective monuments at the Kapyong Battle site.

The Canadians held services in the Canadian Peace Park, which is adjacent to the positions they defended during the battle.

The British veterans held services at Solma Ri on the banks of the Imjin River, where they fought in the four-day long Battle of the Imjin River, at the same time that the battle at Kapyong was raging, as were battles in other points along the front line.

A follow-on article will be published about the Canadian services at the Kapyong Memorial, held in the Pacific Rim National Park on Vancouver Island. One of the principals present was LCol (Ret'd) John Bishop, who had served as a corporal during the Kapyong battle, and on his return to Canada earned a commission and had a distinguished career in the Canadian Army.

Finally, in this article, it is fitting to remind all Canadian veterans, and to let those in other nations know, that it was just two years ago that Senator Yonah Martin authored the Bill that resulted in the Canadian Parliament passing a statute that was signed by the Governor General of Canada, which proclaimed that July 27 is known as **Korean War Veterans Armistice Day**, and would be officially recognized as such in perpetuity. The Bill became law in Canada on June 19, 2013.

