

Korean War Veteran

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Famed Imjin River Memorial Cup stolen in Seoul, Canadian hockey player-professor takes lead in getting it returned



Imjin River Cup shown on Rideau Canal in Imjin River Cup Memorial Classic hockey tournament arranged by Canada's Senator Yonah Martin in 2013.

My goodness, Veterans, a U.S. Air Force sergeant liked our Imjin River Cup so much that he stole it and gave it to a buddy who took it to Alaska.

But he messed with the wrong hockey players.

The coveted trophy, now becoming quite famous, was purchased by Canadian hockey player Anrew Monteith and the Canadian owner of Gecko's saloon in Itaewon, Chris Damboise in 2000, after they discovered through a photo a friend acquired in Uijongbu that Canadian soldiers had played hockey on the Imjin River ice near a position where the U.S. artillery 8-inch persuaders fired their colossal shells.

The saloon owner, Chris Damboise, who also was a prominent video animator in Korea, was sponsoring a new hockey team for Geckos and outfitted it with first class attire, required personal equipment, etc. He and Monteith then organized the now classic Imjin River Cup Tournament. (*See the history below sent by Andrew Monteith in 2012*).

In the first season his Gecko's Glaciers wore the insignia of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry on their jerseys.

In later years, competing teams took the names of famous Canadian regiments, naval vessels or RCAF units during the tournament. (Andrew reports that one team also took the name of a famous U.S. airborne regiment that made a parachute drop in North Korea in 1950). The tournament wasn't played on Imjin River ice, but in a huge indoor ice rink.

One year, it was even played on a public rink in front of Seoul City Hall, while a corresponding match, organized by Canada's Senator Yonah Martin, was held on the Rideau Canal in Ottawa, with MPs and Senators, including then VAC Minister Steven Blaney, vying against a military team – mostly officers from the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry.

Present in Ottawa for that game, which was paid for by funds voluntary provided by Korean community sources, veterans and others, were Canadian Veterans who really had played hockey on the Imjin River ice. One was Dennis Moore who had played in Korea in the first hockey match held on the Imjin River in January, 1952 for the 1st Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry,



Senator Yonah Martin with Andrew Monteith at the Imjin River Memorial Classic, played on the ice of the Rideau River in 2013. Andrew had flown over from Seoul.



Face off at Seoul City Hall, February 3, 1953, RCAF Sergeant Marc Bellemare (blue jersey, Royal 22eR team), faces off with Chad Lynch, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry team. Gentleman behind Bellemare is David Chatterson, then Canada's Ambassador to South Korea. Dropping the puck is Canadian Olympic speed skating champion Catriona Lemay-Doan. Bellemare's R22eR team won. He later was assistant coach at the Imjin River Classic in Ottawa.

Professor Andrew Monteith describes saga of stolen Imjin River Cup

We got on the phone with Andrew "Monty" Monteith, who with Chris Framboise brought the Imjin River tournaments and the coveted Imjin River Trophy into being.

Firstly, Andrew says he is "*Very, very, very glad*" to get the trophy back and was "heartbroken" when he first learned it had been stolen.

"I helped develop the trophy (and tournament), I played on the ice to win it, I carried it with me to Canada (for the Imjin River Memorial Cup tournament organized by Canada's Senator Yonah Martin)," Andrew explained.

Of the recovery of the stolen cup, Senator Martin sent this message to the Korean War Veteran publication:

"I am extremely relieved to know that the stolen Imjin River Memorial Cup has been safely recovered, and wish to express my sincere appreciation to Korean authorities and others whose efforts led to the recovery of the legendary Cup. There are some things you cannot ever replace for its value is priceless."

This year's Imjin River Cup tournament wound up in May with the RCAF's 15 Wing Moosejaw team victorious, taking three out of five games in just four. We suspect that RCAF Sergeant Marc Bellemare was responsible for naming the team. He was an official coach at the game on the Rideau Canal in Ottawa and who managed and played in one of the tournaments on ice at Seoul City Hall when he was assistant to the Canadian defence attache in Seoul.

Andrew says atmosphere at this year's tournament was somewhat morose, as the trophy Imjin River Cup was missing and he never expected to see it again.

He recounts the tale of the stolen cup and how he brought in the names of Senator Martin and Prime Minister Stephen Harper when questioning the suspect who proved to have stolen it.

It happened at Gecko's saloon in Itaewon. Andrew had held a hockey draft there and had taken the cup to display and arouse interest in the tournament. There was so much interest that he decided to leave it in the safe keeping of the Gecko's staff. It had previously resided there for several years before the saloon had changed ownership and the staff is well known by Andrew and many other Canadian expatriots.

However, on April 12 the cup was reported missing. Andrew frantically scoured the sides streets and alleys, hoping whoever had taken it might have quickly decided they had made a mistake and tossed it away. Who could hope to conceal or fence a large trophy, engraved with the names of many Canadian expatriot hockey teams, the history of the Imjin River hockey games played by Canadian soldiers (*and which also is engraved with the name of the publisher of the Korean War Veteran*)?

There was no luck. It was gone.

Andrew launched a search and put out a reward of \$500. The message was sent to everyone on the Gecko's Bar registry and all hockey players in the league. (There are several hockey leagues in Korea and Japan).

They got a response. Somebody had seen somebody in another bar drinking beer from a large trophy, dancing with it, etc.

Andrew and associates retrieved closed circuit TV footage from that bar. There he was, the culprit in civilian clothing, dancing with the famed Imjin River Cup, obviously very intoxicated.

The tape was given to Korean police, but they could do nothing without a name. They could not turn the matter over to U.S. military police without it.

Stills from the video were sent out and somebody not only identified but named the suspect.

Andrew was called to a police station where the suspect, an air force staff sergeant, was waiting along with a captain from his unit, along with Korean police detectives.

Andrew was asked to question the suspect, and took on the role of policeman.

He recalls that he spoke courteously to the sergeant, told him the significance and history of the Imjin River Cup, asked how he could have stolen something of such intrinsic and historic value, how he could not in good conscience return it.

He showed him photographs of Sergeant Marc Bellemare of the RCAF letting Canada's Prime Minister Stephen Harper admire the coveted trophy when he had visited Korea.



Prime Minister Stephen Harper admires Imjin River Cup aboard his aircraft in Seoul, 1953, along with RCAF Sergeant Mac Bellemare. Marc was then defence attache assistant at the Canadian Embassy and took the coveted trophy to the team. Prime Minister Harper keeps a photo of one of the original hockey games played by Canadian soldiers on the Imjin River in one of his offices.

Andrew said that if the Imjin River Cup was returned to Geckos that no charges would be placed.

The suspect denied any knowledge of the cup. He also alleged that he had been intoxicated and could remember nothing about being in the saloon or the names of anyone else who had been in his party.

Andrew notes that the Korean police, once they grasped the historic significance and importance of the trophy, were very cooperative and diligent.

At the end of the interview Andrew upped the challenge to the suspect. He told him that he had no choice except to bring Canadian Ambassador Walsh into the picture, as well as Senator Martin.

Andrew thinks that swayed the suspect.

He could not believe it when a detective phoned him this month and told him that the Imjin River Cup had been recovered.

It seems that the sergeant who took it somehow put it in the hands of a U.S. Army soldier who took it to Alaska with him. It had been shipped back from Alaska.

Andrew was looking at the cup when he spoke with us on the phone.

It had been returned with both handles missing and with a couple of the engraved plates on the base removed.

He is having it repaired and can have new plates engraved, as he has all records of the tournaments.

So next year, once again, the Imjin River Cup will be on hand when the tournament is held in Seoul and once again the winning team's name and victory will be added to the ever growing base.

Very well done, Andrew "Monty" Monteith, professor of English language at Seoul's Hongik University.

Below is an article from today's Korea Times describing the theft of the Imjin River Cup.

The brief history of the Imjin River Cup that Andrew had sent in 2012 can be read below the article.

GI charged with stealing Canadian hockey trophy

By Jung Min-ho

A U.S. serviceman will face theft charges for stealing a trophy that commemorates Canada's participation in the 1950-53 Korean War.

The silver trophy was made in 2000 for the winners of an ice hockey tournament, launched in memory of Canadian soldiers who, during the war, found respite from the conflict through playing ice hockey on the frozen Imjin River, a short distance from the frontline.

According to Yongsan Police Station in Seoul, Wednesday, a staff sergeant in the 8th U.S. Army, stole the trophy from a bar in Itaewon, Seoul, on April 4 and gave it to a colleague who eventually took it to Alaska in the United States.

Their identities are being withheld.

The staff sergeant was questioned by police after they obtained surveillance camera footage that shows him dancing with the trophy at the bar. The trophy had been on display at the bar, one of sponsors of the ice hockey tournament. He initially denied allegations that he stole it, but later admitted that he did so. Upon the sergeant's request, the colleague sent the trophy to Korean police by mail, which arrived in the country on June 16 with little damage to it.

Police said the staff sergeant will face charges of theft here.

Prof. Andrew Monteith, who teaches English at Hongik University in Seoul, played a big role in getting the trophy back to Korea. He called police when it disappeared and asked for help from the Embassy of Canada in Korea to locate it. Canada sent almost 27,000 troops to Korea and suffered 1,158 casualties of which 516 men died.

BRIEF HISTORY OF IMJIN RIVER CUP SENT BY ANDREW MONTEITH IN 2012

Vince,

I am taking this time to give you a brief history of the Imjin River Memorial Cup and the Geckos hockey team.

Back in 1999 the Geckos Hockey team was founded by two gentlemen: Pascal Comeau (currently living in Quebec) and of course Chris Damboise whom you have met. and is living in Ontario.

Chris and his then wife Jin, proudly sponsored our team by offering funding but more than anything else, a place to gather have a few beers and talk hockey, politics or just life in general. I'm happy to say that we are still having beers and conversations at Geckos 13 years later.

I joined the team in 2000 as did quite a few other hockey starved Canadians. I think it was during that summer that Chris stumbled upon the now infamous Imjin River photo at the U.N Compound in Itaewon. That's where you come in Vince, I believe you were there as well and provided Chris with the details surrounding the picture as well as a way to get some prints of the photo and you kindly gave us a brief written script of the game in question, which is printed on a side of the cup..Hence, that is why your name is enshrined on the cup.

Back to the cup though.. After proudly putting the photo up on the wall at Geckos and in my own office, I came across this wonderful cup in the back alleys of Dongdaemun and just knew we had to have it. I believe it was Chris, Pascal and I who were sitting around the bar one night when the idea came to use the cup to honor the memory of that "magnificent game" by having a tournament amongst our own Geckos players. The rest is really history and each year the tournament grows in popularity and importance. After Pascal and Chris left the peninsula, I took over the team and tried to keep the momentum of The Imjin River Cup going. I recently gave the cup a facelift by changing all of the team names to reflect actual regiments who fought in the Korean war. Now all captains must name their team after a regiment or batallion. While most of the regiments are invariably Canadian, one of our captains who served in the American Forces during his playing days here in Korea chose to name his team after the famous American "Rakkanasans 187 rgt." the unit that his father fought for and jumped for during the Korean War.

So obviously this cup has grown over the past 12 years and hopefully, it will continue to do so. It would be great to bring it to Ottawa and show it off and give it the recognition it deserves.

Thanks for all you've done for our team and all of the Veterans out there. Vince, you are a true patriot.

If there is anything else you would like to know, don't hesitate to ask.

I will be in touch with Chris to let him know about the upcoming game, I'm sure he would love to attend.

Merry Christmas,

Andrew John Monteith