

America's Forgotten Victory!

# KOREA VETERANS Graybeards



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# Preserving ‘Our Legacy’

By Tom Thiel

The word “Legacy” has begun to appear in Korean veterans’ literature and other such resources. Not being certain exactly what the word means, I looked up legacy in a number of online dictionaries. Legacy is “something that is a part of your history or that remains from an earlier time.” (Cambridge English Dictionary).

Heck, KWVA Chapter 169 members have been addressing their legacy for quite some time now. We have been doing KWVA’s Tell America programs regularly for about the last eight years! But that only reaches an audience of mostly high school students, so it is relatively limited in its scope. Even when one of our schools, Eustis HS, video recorded about fifteen of us that didn’t extend very far, because plans to preserve those recordings never solidified.

We were aware of the Library of Congress Veterans programs but they are, as far as we were concerned, out of our reach (although several members gave interviews to the volunteers at Cooper Memorial Library, Clermont, FL, that were printed in a book and we believe were then forwarded to LOC).

Through The Graybeards and kwva.org/ we also learned of the efforts of The Korean War Legacy Foundation <http://www.kwvdm.org/>, and that it was strongly supported by KWVA. But again, that was not exactly in our backyard here in Central Florida.

Then, in 2015, we learned of an effort that was sort of in our back yard, The Veterans History Project of Orlando’s University of Central Florida History Department (UCF is the second largest college in the U.S.—look it up). I contacted them. On March 9, 2015, they sent an interview team to meet me at the Bland Library in Mount Dora (less than two miles from my home).

I was very impressed with my interview team and began “selling” my Ch 169 members on signing up for interviews (not an easy job at all), and at the same time “convincing” UCF on the desirability of them coming to Lake County (at least an hour from the UCF Campus) to interview 169 members (much easier).

In November 2016, UCF declared a “Lake County Veterans Day,” assembled several interview teams, and began interview-

List of Ch 169 members interviewed—so far

ing Ch 169 members at the Leesburg and Lady Lake, Florida libraries.

Twenty veterans have been interviewed so far. Every one of them was elated with the experience; I am elated by the collective content of their interviews! I hope you are too.

In an effort to make them more easily accessible, I created the associated webpage that I hope facilitates your access to the interviews. Just go to [cid169.kwva.org/](http://cid169.kwva.org/) and select the link “Our Korea Legacy (UCF Interviews)” from the Home Page. Click on that and you will be directed to the page.

The stories told are worth your time. They all start with where and when we were born, and rapidly escalate to our experiences. At least two state that they have never mentioned what they were about to say ever before.

We are continuing to facilitate our member interviews; however, the latest list has been reduced by two, who took their legacies with them as they passed too quickly last week!

So, why did I write this article? Why in The Graybeards? Because time is of the essence! Your stories are unique. They are significant! There has never been one like yours. Someday someone will find your story incredibly valuable.

I do not know why so many veterans are so reluctant to leave their legacy to their future generations—I cannot count the number of family members alone who contacted me and are agonizing over not knowing what daddy did in Korea!

Please turn to **LEGACY** on page 24

**Korean War & Korea Defense Service Veterans, Lake Co. (FL),**

**Our Korea Legacy--UCF-VHP Interviews of CID169 Members**

UCF-VHP Link

Joel Briggs	Bob Peters	Gordon Talbot
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	Harold Sievera	Charlie White
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D.J. Lynch	Al Stover	Bryant "Woodie" Wood, Jr.
Sue Mason		Gene Zender

## Thanks for Supporting *The Graybeards* and the KWVA

Members are invited to help underwrite the publication costs of *The Graybeards*. All contributions in any amount are welcome. Mail your donations to KWVA Treasurer, 430 W. Lincoln Ave., Charleston, IL 61920 or [Treasurer@KWVA.org](mailto:Treasurer@KWVA.org). All contributions will be acknowledged, unless the donor specifically requests to remain anonymous. And, if you have an “In memory of” (IMO) request, include that as well. We thank you for your generous support.

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# The Golden Rice Bowl – 1952

By Al Kreymer

No, it wasn't solid gold, but it looked like it to me, as it sat there on a shelf in the entryway. There were four rice bowls on it, two large and two small, that said something of the station in life of this household. To be able to afford these priceless items of antiquity the family would have had to be fairly well off.

My adventure starts just outside Yokota Air Base somewhere near the center of the main island of Japan in late 1952. I had arrived in Japan only weeks before, and was chomping at the bit to do some exploring when someone mentioned the steam train that ran to the north end of the island. That prompted me to start planning for my next few days off.

My friend and I boarded the steam train on the following Saturday. WWII had been over for only a few years. The Japanese economy had just started to recover and industrial activity was in full swing across the empire. Interestingly, quite a bit of the manufacturing activity took place out in the back country, even in private homes.

We had traveled north about two hours on the slow steam train when we decided to get off at the next station and do some exploring on foot. It was a small station, about the size of a standard outhouse, positioned at the mouth of a steep canyon with a rickshaw trail inviting us to follow.

It seemed good to be hiking after a couple of hours spent bumping along on the train. It was soon obvious that we were heading into some interesting territory as we neared a village of more or less connected bamboo houses perched precariously on both steep hillsides above a canyon. Bamboo and paper-walled houses in an area where winter set in? I didn't have an answer. Checking on the map, I discovered that we were far enough north for at least mild winters.

Anyhow, back to the rickshaw trail that led us to the doorstep of one of the houses. There was Papa-san sitting on the porch. (Papa-san is what we called the older father of the house.) Papa-san signaled us to come in. We took him up on his invitation.

From the outside the place didn't look like much. I was astounded when we entered. Beautiful Oriental rugs adorned the walls and floor. Chinese lanterns of the brightest colors hung from the ceiling, and a shelf held the golden rice bowls.

Our first problem was the language barrier. Fortunately, I'd been in Japan for a while, so I spoke fluent Japanese—two words of it. So, we began an exchange of sign language. Surprisingly, we more or less closed the communication gap.

Papa-san led me into the rest of the building where there were rows of well-dressed Oriental ladies in colorful kimonos at weaving tables and treadle sewing machines. The place was a beehive of activity. What amazed me was that these ladies were working; yet, they were dressed fit for the stage. We moved on to the next building, which was filled with vats of dye into which workers put color into the fabric, one strand at a time.

There was no electricity that I noticed. Everything was processed by hand and passed to the weavers at the large looms.

Our first problem was the language barrier. Fortunately, I'd been in Japan for a while, so I spoke fluent Japanese—two words of it. So, we began an exchange of sign language. Surprisingly, we more or less closed the communication gap.

It looked to me like it took days and days to turn out the finished product. If I don't miss my guess, the place would have been automated within the next few years, and the workers would be turning out their finished products in minutes instead of weeks.

Our tour was over when we returned to Papa-san's house. There, his wife served us a delicious fish cake with rice in a rice bowl (no, not the gold ones). Of course there was tea in a very delicate cup. All this came with firsthand instructions on the use of chopsticks. That, as I can attest to, is where patience and perseverance come into play, especially when you are hungry.

It made for a good laugh on their part to watch a couple hungry kids fending off starvation by balancing one grain of rice on two sticks. "Boy," I thought, "just wait until we tell the guys back at the barracks about these eating sticks."

Well, as the old saying goes, all good fun things eventually come to an end. The time came for us to return to the little outhouse train station. Papa-san helpfully dug out his train schedule. With an air of teaching a little kid how to tell time, he went through several timepieces until I caught on to what time the return train would arrive. We had plenty of time to go back down the rickshaw trail, so we visited a while longer. Believe me, Papa-san was a good host, in spite of the language barrier.

I had wanted to ask about the two small golden rice bowls, but I held my curiosity in check. These people were of the age where they could have had kids old enough to have been involved in WWII. Maybe I did right by not asking.

The train was on time and we rocked, bounced, and swayed our way back the two hours to the air base, all the way planning for the next trip on the steam train.

*Al Kreymer, PO Box 391, Newport WA 99156*

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## LEGACY from page 6

If you are in Central Florida, do it with UCF! If you can, do it with The Korean War Legacy Foundation. I would like to see the Foundation incorporate our interviews into their resource base. I would encourage KWVA to do more to enable the Foundation to expand to areas away from the northeast!

However you do it, just do it—now!

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