Memories of a forgotten war – Korea veterans

Kingsman Brian Hough, Corporal Alan Wilson and Kingsman Derek Smith - all from Manchester

As the 65th anniversary of the start of the conflict approaches, national commemorations will honour the 63,000 British troops who joined the Allied forces in Korea between June 1950 and July 1953.

Legasee Educational Trust's project, Korea – the Forgotten War, will cast a local perspective on the anniversary.

The Korean War has a particularly strong legacy in the North West. Ashton-under-Lyne was one of the main recruitment barracks for the area and of the four Victoria Crosses awarded to those who served in the war, two went to North West servicemen. The region also has the largest number of surviving veterans, with 200 members in The Greater Manchester British Korean Veterans Association (BKVA). Liverpool, Preston and the Wirral also had very active branches.

It is these veterans that the project will focus on.

Manchester University students, volunteers and children from local schools will take part in workshops, research and leading interviews with at least 50 veterans. Recorded onto high-quality digital film, the testimonies will provide an invaluable insight into first-hand experiences of the conflict.

Korean veteran, Brian Hough, said: “This project will be a wonderful testimony not only for today’s students of modern history, but also for future students, to see and hear first-hand accounts of the first war in the history of the world to be fought under the banner of the United Nations. It will also give Korean Veterans, many of whom were conscripts, the opportunity to tell their stories and not be forgotten.”

The project also has the support of the local Korean community and Manchester University’s Korean Student Society will take part. The Greater Manchester BKVA will help to recruit veterans for the project.

Despite its significant impact on 20th and 21st century history, compared to other conflicts the Korean War is under-documented and personal stories are often unheard. This project aims to give Korean veterans a louder voice and add their testimonies to Legasee Educational Trust’s growing national digital film library, which so far contains over 300 hours of interviews, photographs and other information from veterans of military action – including the Battle of Britain and women on the front-line in Afghanistan.

The films will be shared on the organisation’s website and hard-copies made available at Tameside Local Studies and Archive Centre. The Tameside Local Studies and Archive will also host an exhibition exploring the significance of the war and the role played by servicemen from the North West.

Sara Hilton, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund North West, said: “Thanks to money raised by National Lottery players, we’re delighted to support this project which will see people of all ages build skills and hear first-hand personal stories of the Korean War. Not only will the project recognise this historic but often forgotten event during this anniversary year, but will also create a permanent digital legacy which will ensure veteran’s voices can be heard by generations to come.”

Martin Bisiker, Legasee Trustee said: “It is wonderful that HLF will enable us to record the personal stories of local veterans who were involved in a war that is too often forgotten. We are looking to interview anybody who served in the Korean War and have a story to tell. Please call Martin on tel: 02070339773 or email: martin@legasee.org.uk if you would like to be part of the project or know some-one who should be.”

Notes to editors

About Legasee Educational Trust

Legasee Educational Trust is a charity set up to record the experiences and observations of all veterans of conflict from the Second World War until the present day. ‘To create the largest online film archive of this aspect of our social history that can be used for education, learning and better understanding for today’s generation and many generations to come’. Legasee’s film archive is well regarded and used to support articles written by respected publications like the Guardian newspaper educational supplements. See the Legasee website for more information.

About Greater Manchester BKVA (British Korean Veterans Association)

The Manchester branch of the BKVA was formed on 10 October 1978. The first Chairman of the Manchester branch had been with the first British troops to land in Korea, 1st Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, one of the past Presidents of the branch served with The Gloucestershire Regiment at the battle of the Imjin River. The last Standard bearer had served with the Royal Northumberland Fusiliers. As the membership grew, it represented all branches of the British armed forces. It forged close links with other branches both in the North West, and nationally. Over the years the Manchester branch provided two National Chairmen, one National Secretary, two National Recruitment Officers, and the first National Overseas Coordinator who planned the visits back to Korea for veterans from across the UK. Greater Manchester not only played a leading part in the Korean War, but also in working for the welfare of all veterans for many

years since the cease fire.

Veteran John Bowler being interviewed

Memories of Korea