

**A sacrifice that mattered: Saying thanks for 'The Forgotten War'**

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By **Sean Kirst / The Post-Standard**



Peter Chen/The Post-StandardJongwoo Han (right,) an adjunct associate professor at Syracuse University, and Fotini Gan (back,) an SU senior, are among those working on a Korean War digital memorial to honor the sacrifice of veterans of that war. With them are Korean War veterans (l to r) Bruce Ackerman, of Minoa, Bill O'Kane, of Minoa, and Norman Champagne, of North Syracuse. The three served in the Marine Corp.

***Memories and artifacts:***

*Korean War veterans or family members wishing to take part in a new digital memorial can contact Jongwoo Han, project coordinator, by calling 443-5856 or emailing him at **[jonghan@maxwell.syr.edu](mailto:jonghan@maxwell.syr.edu)**.*

Herbert and Lyell Brown were raised in Wayne County during the Great Depression. Herbert was the elder brother by two years, and the boys shared a room throughout much of childhood. When they were teens, Lyell recalls, Herbert put an old truck engine inside a "stripped down Model A," and the brothers spent hours ripping along country roads.

As he told those stories, Lyell had to pause to collect himself. He is 77, a retired truck driver in Auburn, but the images stay vivid: Herbert went into the Army in 1949. Lyell enlisted two years later. While both young men were sent to fight in the Korean War, Lyell had no idea where his brother was stationed. In 1951, he was walking through a military camp at Pusan when he came upon Herbert by sheer chance.

Even in Korea, Herbert served as the big brother. The war was turning into a bloody standoff. In their brief time together, Lyell unloaded all his worries. "I told him I didn't know what was going to happen," Lyell said. Herbert smiled and promised everything would be all right.

"He says, 'Don't worry, brother. God's with us,'" Lyell said. "Then he was sent back to the front lines, and he was killed."

On Veterans Day, Lyell takes satisfaction in knowing his memories of Herbert have found their way into a new kind of monument. Lyell recently did a video interview for the Korean War Veterans Digital Memorial, an ambitious effort to honor the bond between South Korea and soldiers from abroad who fought on its behalf. The founders of the memorial sum up their feelings in a poster, filled with letters and photographs from the front lines, that challenges the notion of Korea as "The Forgotten War."

"This can be as big as we want it to be," said Jongwoo Han, principal of the Central New York Korean School and a faculty member at Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Citizenship & Public Affairs. It was Jongwoo, a native of South Korea, who created the project about six years ago. He understood that South Korean prosperity is built upon the

sacrifice of more than 54,000 Americans who died in the struggle with the Communist regime in North Korea.

The memorial led to an alliance between Jongwoo and the Syracuse-based Chapter 105 of the Korean War Veterans Association. Norman Champagne, 79, a veteran from North Syracuse, said many Americans never appreciated the suffering of troops and civilians in Korea. "There was no recognition," Champagne said. "When we came home, people would look at us and say, 'Where've you been?'"

The war was often dismissed as a pointless stalemate, an uncomfortable result after the "total victory" of World War II. Jongwoo prefers to **express a simple truth**: If the United States had elected in 1950 to stay out of Korea, his homeland would almost certainly be controlled by the same oppressive regime that rules North Korea.

"Instead, we became the most vibrant democracy in Asia," Jongwoo said. "This is all about doing something, in a real sense, to thank the veterans who fought for the Korean nation. Without them, I could not have become what I am."

His answer is the digital memorial, expected to be available online by early December. The South Korean government provided seed money, Jongwoo said. And he said the national KWVA embraced the idea, after Jongwoo and Champagne offered a presentation at a conference in Boston.

The memorial already includes 36 interviews and nearly 2,000 documents, photographs and other artifacts. Much of the research was done by SU students In-Kyung Choi, Youngseek Kim, Jinhee Park and Fotini Gan. "I know people say the younger generation doesn't care about the past, but I think there are (young) people who know you can't really do something with your life unless you know your history," Gan said.

For Jongwoo, the satisfaction lies in reassuring elderly veterans that their sacrifice will be honored in a lasting way. Noreen Jankowski of Geddes, for instance, took part in a video

interview about her husband Ed, who died two years ago. During the war, Noreen recalled, they wrote letters every day. Almost 60 years later, she can visualize the moment when Ed arrived home at the old train station on Erie Boulevard.

There was no reunion for Lyell and Herbert Brown. Over the years, the pain was often harsh enough to cause Lyell to avoid thinking about the war. Still, he didn't hesitate when offered a chance to sit before a camera and talk about his brother. He did it based on the hope we'll remember one thing:

Herbert Brown, and thousands like him, died for a reason.

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