



South Korea's Vice-Veterans Minister Kang Yun-Jin is highly respected by the world's Korean War Veterans as a warm and truly sincere advocate for those who are still with us today and those who have passed on. She is dedicated to honoring those who fell in the Korean War, and she set goals for the recovery and repatriation of those who are still listed as missing in action. Of the 7,359 American soldiers who are still listed as missing in action she is pressing to realize a goal of recovering 7,000 of them.

2026 International Conference on Veterans Affairs

Honoring the Peace and Freedom Achieved Together

By Vince Courtenay

Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs assigns its Youth Ambassador to recruit youths for future conferences and events

I am writing this to encourage all Korean War Veterans and their descendant families to consider availing themselves of the splendid youth educational and

commemoration programs available from South Korea's Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs for the veterans' children, grandchildren and great grandchildren.



Following stirring ceremonies at the Korean War Veterans Memorial on the Mall youth descendants were taken to some of Washington's iconic heritage landmarks including the Lincoln Memorial, symbolic of union and preservation of the United States, now marking its 250th year. From left are Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs Youth Ambassador Rachel Cote from Canada; Jemma Bowers, South Africa; Amaris Courtenay from the United States; Asia Campbell, Youth Ambassador for both the Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs and the United Nations Memorial Cemetery in her home city of Busan, South, Korea; and Tanner MacDonald and Kayden Kavanaugh, descendants of Korean War Veterans from Canada. Both came from beautiful Cape Breton Island in Nova Scotia, Canada.

I have spent the past week with the electric, exciting, joy filled messages from a group of wonderful young people who took part in the MPVA's 2026 International Conference on Veterans Affairs which was held in Washington, DC. The venue had been changed from Seoul to Washington in salute to America's 250th birthday, and to enhance collaboration between the two nations' veterans affairs policies, including devising new educational programs and opportunities for the young descendants of the soldiers from the many nations who defended South Korea during the war.

An accord was reached and signed in which the United States and Korea and other nations will more fully cooperate in passing on to present and future generations the legacies born of the freedom made possible by the sacrifices of those who defended South Korea during the war.



This photo shows the same group at the Korean War Veterans Memorial following the formal remembrance and wreath placement service at the Korean War Veterans Memorial, part of which is in view behind them. The MPVA had the youths take it easy as spectators that morning and not actively participate in the service because

they had worked long hours in workshops and subconferences the previous day. The youths spoke with one voice and said that tired or not, they would have been honored to place a wreath for all fallen service personnel, including their own relatives. And so next year it will be done.

Having descendant youths participate in the conference was a great benefit for both the veterans present, the officials holding the conference, and for the grandchildren. All of them learned from each other by direct participation in the



programs.

Some of the youths made presentations, including in forums that studied ways to improve public education systems to ensure the Korean War and its soldiers of freedom are never forgotten.

And for the grandchildren it was great fun as well, and our honor that they were there to represent us.

The team that we followed is shown in this registration photo expressing their joy and enthusiasm for honouring their veteran forbears.

Top left Tanner MacDonald (Canada), Julian Anderson (Wisconsin), Shin Yun Jung (Korea), Kayden Kavanaugh (Canada), Song Yu Jin (Korea), Tristan Courtenay (California) Front row Jemma Bowers (South Africa), Amaris Courtenay (California), Asia Campbell (Korea), Rachel Cote (Canada). Not shown Jayden Merie (Michigan).

For instructions on how to register descendant youths and next of kin relatives for the future international conferences and events, see the last page of this article.

Hanging out on their arrival in Washington



Happy foursome of first arrivals take stroll through Old Town in Alexandria, Virginia. Jayden Merie (foreground) is escorted by Asia Campbell, the group's ex officio leader who actually helped organize their participation in the event, and Song Yu Jin and Shin Yun Jeon. He soon became their devoted coffee carrier while they

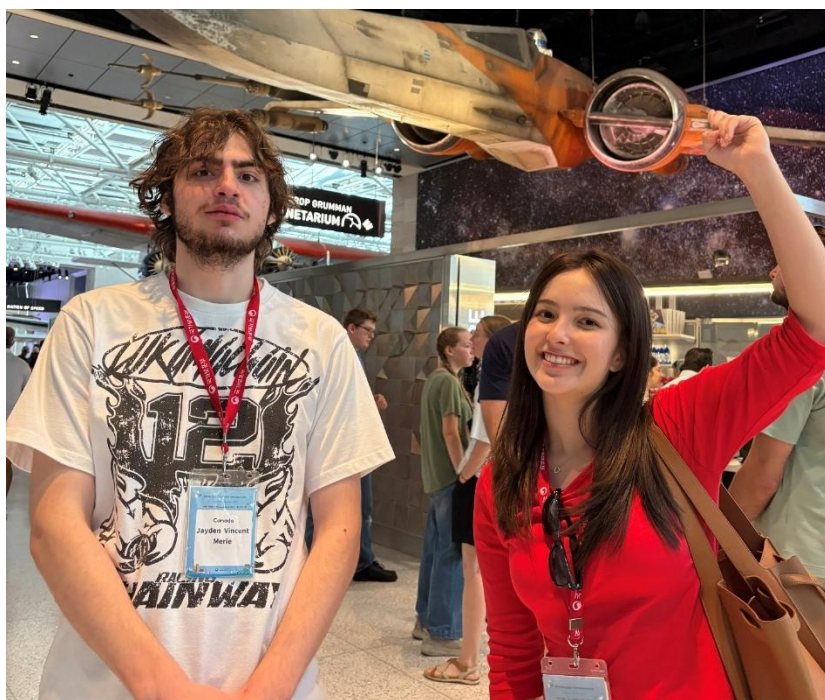


shopped in the various boutiques. Asia and Yu Jin took to a bookshop and quickly scanned the pages of the suspense novel 'We Were Liars' by E. Lockhart, a New York Times list best seller. They stayed close friends

throughout the conference, plan to keep in touch and meet in the future.



The early arrivals group wandered far throughout Alexandria, which is situated in Virginia on the banks of the Potomac River, directly across from Washington, DC. As the program evolved there was opportunity for everyone to visit the renowned



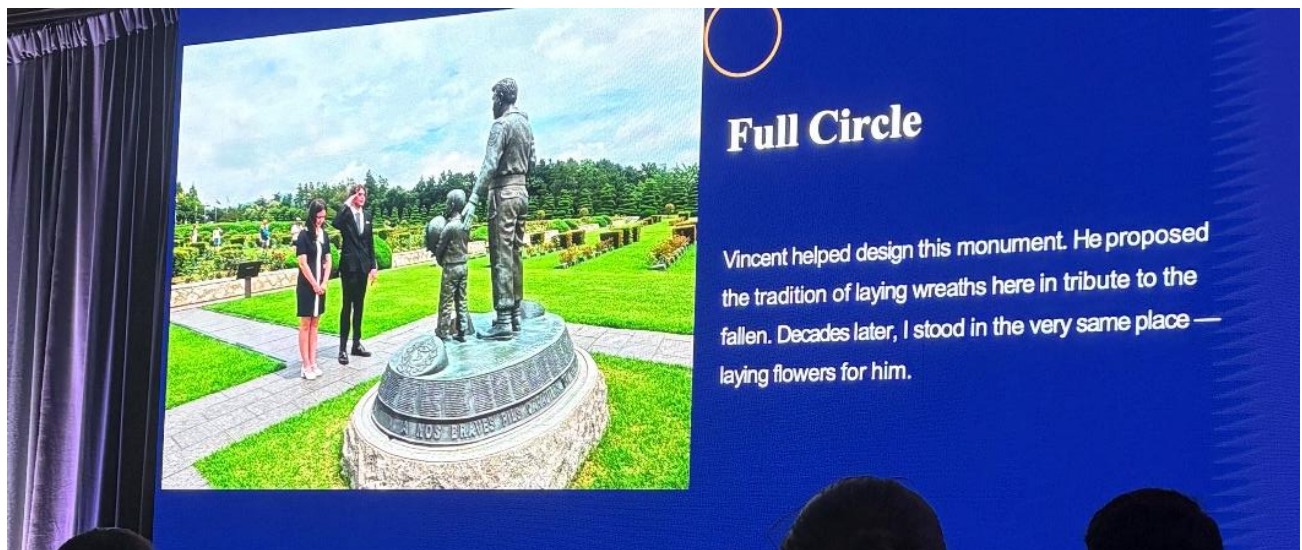
Smithsonian Institute and other venues of public interest. Buses were provided.

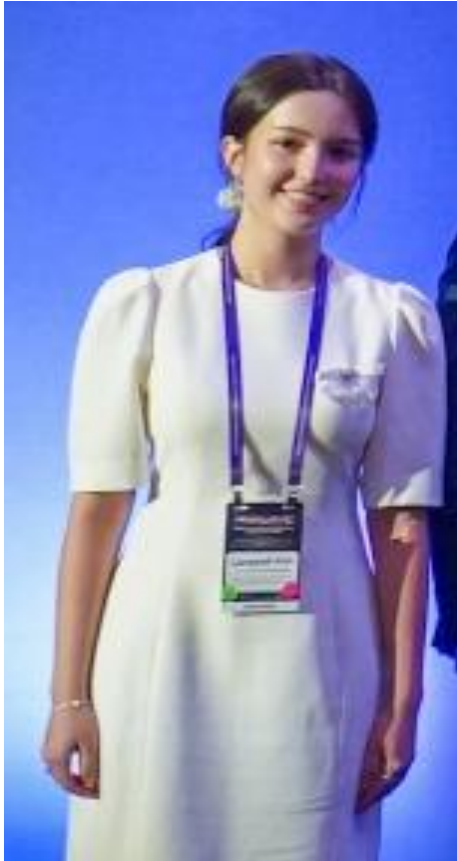
Shown left is group leader Asia Campbell giving a team cheer gesture alongside her erstwhile coffee carrier, now good friend, Jayden Merie.

They are standing beneath a “Starship” model in the Smithsonian Astrophysical Laboratory. Later they both made key presentations to the conference delegates.



Jayden Merie made a moving illustrated presentation entitled ‘Carrying the Torch, My Grandfather’s War.’ In it he quickly defined how his grandfather had volunteered at age 16, the battles he fought in, things he had done through the decades after the war to ensure his comrades would never be forgotten. Jayden says now things have come full circle, that the mantle has passed to him and his generation and it is their job to carry on with that work to make sure those who served in the Korean War are never forgotten.





Asia Campbell has high qualifications for making speeches and presentations. In Korea she has two of her own TV shows and a radio show on the Korea Broadcasting System. She has unique love for veterans who served in the Korean War, going back to the time at age eight when she won a letter writing contest that enabled her to travel to Europe to begin meeting Korean War Veterans.

She has been presented to two presidents of South Korea and a year ago traveled to Paris with the Prime Minister's group and made her own presentation to the Bureau International Expositions, seeking to get her hometown of Busan designated as the site for the 2030 World's Fair. Through the years she has worked closely with the MPVA on many meaningful projects, including distribution of face masks to veterans around the world during the Covid pandemic.

She lives not far from the United Nations Memorial Cemetery, of which she is the Youth

Ambassador. Asia is studying premedicine at Dalhousie University in Canada.





For some years now she has visited graves at the request of bereaved family members, placed flowers for them.

For several years in succession she has gone to the UN Cemetery on Christmas morning and placed flowers on the graves of 12 of the soldiers from the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, whom the author of this article served with under fire in Korea.

She tells how the stories of the beloved veterans can be carried into perpetuity.

Their stories will live through their children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren.

They will live through the questions you ask, the names you remember, the photos you keep, and the stories you choose to carry forward. Remembering does not end when a ceremony ends.

It continues when someone asks, "What was his name?"

It continues when a family tells the next generation, "This is what he did."

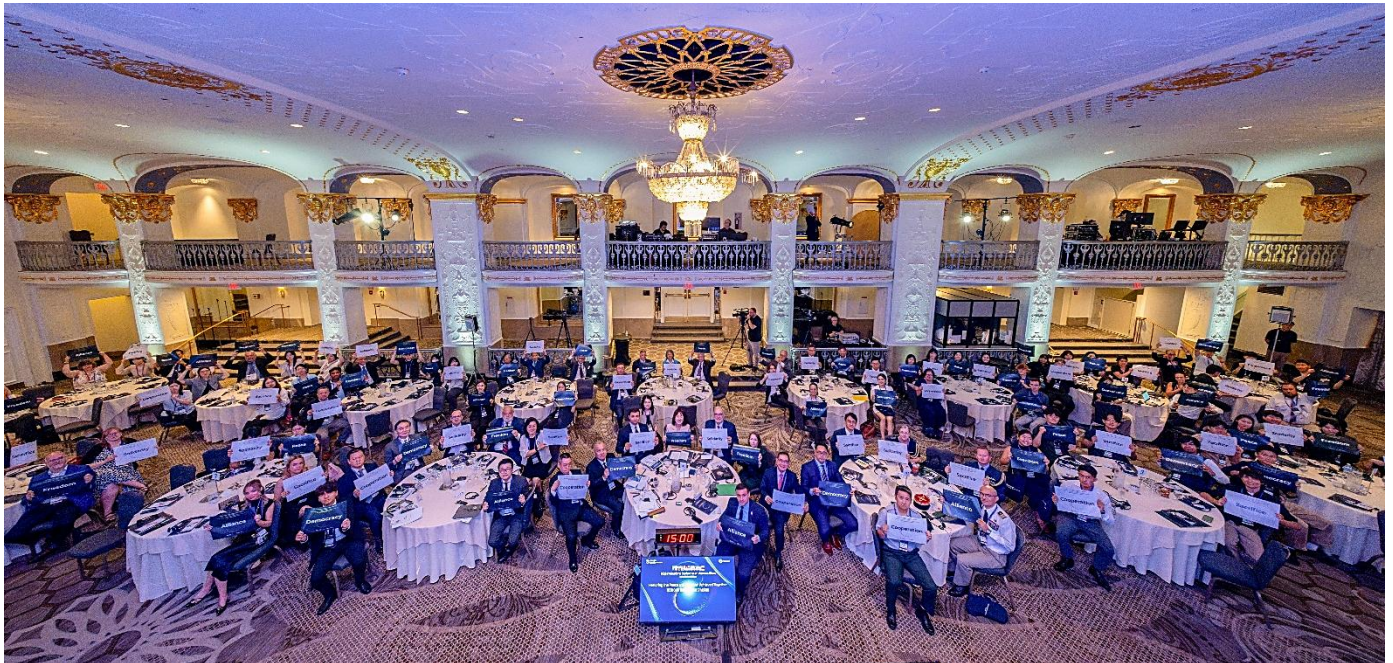
And it continues when we decide that no veteran, no family, and no story should be left behind.

Here is a link to a video of her superb speech.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/19ZBym7me3dhkW2SnTZeZRJhAO1nD1Bf/view?usp=drive_web



Following their presentations Asia Campbell and Jayden Courtenay stood for applause with Vice-Minister Jang and fellow presenters: Emrah Uzar, senior adviser Türkiye; Reynaldo Mapagu, Philippine Veterans Affairs; Kantnat Nikornyanont, Secretary General War Veterans Association of Thailand; Sami Thellier, France veterans affairs; Matthew Skic, senior curator, Museum of American Revolution; Jeff Miller, senior official in the U.S. Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency



At the gala banquet was hosted by MPVA vice chairman Kang Yun-Jin in the historic Grand Ballroom of Washington's lavish Mayflower Hotel the veteran descendants were seated, not as a separate group, but mixed among the war veterans and officials from many of the Korean War allied nations.



Vice-Minister Kang Yun-Jin and all delegates at the Thank You banquet hold posters that proclaim the essence and ramifications of the freedom forged by the allied soldiers who defended the Republic of Korea during the war.



Presenters Asia Campbell and Jayden Merie are seated at the table shown in the upper left corner of this detail taken from the main banquet photo. Other youth delegates were seated at other tables throughout the grand ballroom.



Where else in this world can our descendants gather in one great, gregarious family and revel in their freedom and extol their pride in their forbears who invested their own youth to provide it. Indeed, in such moments, the whole world becomes one for them, and for us, their proud ancestors. We did not know we were giving love to the world so long ago, but see how it surges in the hearts of our kin who rejoice in it today. It makes the heart pump faster, and the spirit feel much warmer.

After the sumptuous Thank You banquet at the Mayflower, our young delegates enjoyed the rest of the evening on their own after an exciting, tremendous, wonderful week. Back at their hotel many whose journey we followed in this brief photo essay crowded into the private room of Jayden Merie where they made plans for their next future meetings and reveled in the closeness of new friends until one 0'clock in the morning.

To register for an MPVA directory to be used in announcing the next conference that will involve Korean War Veteran descendants and next of kin kindly contact MPVA Youth Ambassador Asia Campbell who has been tasked with the outreach:

BIGHEARTASIA@GMAIL.COM

- 1 Name of Veteran
- 2 Nation of Veteran
- 3 Branch of Service
- 4 Year served in Korea, if known
- 5 Descendant names and relationship
(ie Jennifer Smith, granddaughter)
(John Smith, great granddaughter)
- 6 email address for notification

That's all that's required. It may open the door to wonderful experiences including more conferences, the summer Youth Camp in Korea, and other wonderful opportunities.



The 2026 Conference was kindly sponsored by Korea's Hanwha Corporation



Pride in our Korean War Veteran Heritage