



The Korean War and its Legacy

HA Teacher Fellowship Programme 2019

Residential course in Athens, 1-4 August 2019

The latest incarnation of the Historical Association Teacher Fellowships (HATF) is on the Korean War and its legacy. This programme is slightly different from some of the other HA Fellowships in that it is running in parallel with work on the Korean War in the USA and in other countries which took part in the conflict.

[The Korean War Legacy Foundation](#) and [World History Digital Education](#), with generous support from the [Korea Foundation](#) and the [Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs](#), have been supporting teachers who have an interest in teaching the Korean War and its legacy in the USA. They now have several important publications and teacher resources in print as well as a substantial collection of online resources to support US teachers. They run conferences across the USA to help interested teachers.

The Athens conference was the first incarnation of the Foundation's programme to take place outside the USA. There were delegates from several countries who sent troops or medical aid during the Korean War including Greece, the Netherlands, South Africa, Denmark, Luxembourg and Germany. We at the HA were very proud that the largest single contingent was from the UK, representing the Historical Association. Our 8 teachers participating in the HATF programme were chosen in a rigorous selection process and there were many excellent applicants. They were well prepared thanks to some advance suggestions on reading from our academic advisers Tom Hennessey of Canterbury Christchurch University ([@ThomasH91435243](#)) and Grace Huxford of the University of Bristol ([@Grace_Huxford](#)).

The conference opened with an inspiring and informing presentation from Jongwoo Han, President of the Korean War Legacy Foundation. He sketched out the context of the Korean War and also reminded us of some of its less well-known consequences. The impact of the Korean War on Japan's economy was one such example. The placing of US contracts with Japanese organisations in the course of the war had a huge impact on the country's economic growth and was arguably part of the foundation of the future Japanese growth which made Japan a leading world economic power. Dr Han addressed other important issues relating to the development of South Korea in the years which followed the war, from a country devastated by war to a modern, thriving and developed economy and democratic state. This is one of the central themes of the war from a South

Korean perspective and perhaps one which has not received as much attention as it might have in many accounts.

In the next session American educators John Lee, of the National Council for Social Studies, and New York State teacher Greg Alquist demonstrated the origin, development and uses of the teaching materials which the Foundation has been developing to support US teachers in recent years. There were many fascinating examples of engaging and exciting student tasks which students could tackle but we were all very taken with the task which looked at the development of Seoul's present day City Hall. This will be explored further in week 1 of our online programme.

After this the conference heard from distinguished scholars Tom Hennessey and Kathryn Weathersby of Korea University. Professor Hennessey provided some fascinating background and context to the Korean War, demonstrating how the Korean War sat within the wider context of Cold War tensions in Europe and Asia. For many of us in the room we were used to seeing the Cold War as different, separate elements and it was very helpful to see these events and issues connected. Kathryn Weathersby provided some new insights based on the very latest research and on privileged access to Chinese and Soviet archives. One of these was the vital point that the Korean War was the first actual military conflict of the Cold War, and as such began the militarisation of a conflict which had hitherto been political and cultural rather than involving physical force. A second insight was on the issue of why the war continued throughout 1952 and 1953 when a de facto stalemate position had been reached by the latter part of 1951. Based on the archive sources she has researched, Dr Weathersby said that it appears that a key part of the answer to this is that the continuing hostilities suited the purposes, political and military, of both Mao and Stalin. This was new information for most of us and we are now eagerly awaiting her forthcoming article setting out this new insight.

The second day of the conference was largely given over to the different perspectives of the different countries represented at the event. We were fascinated to hear about the experiences of South African Air Force pilots and crew; Greek and Turkish ground troops; and the medical units provided by Germany and Denmark. The delegates from the Netherlands and Luxembourg reminded us that for them the Korean War is seen as a forgotten conflict, and this impression was one which was shared by almost all of the delegates at the event, even the US contingent.

In addition to the country-specific presentations, the UK contingent were able to meet together to consider how the rest of the Fellowship might progress. We considered the upcoming online programme and began to consider the possible types of resources which the Fellows might produce. A rather unscientific poll on Twitter produced some very helpful starting points for discussions about what teachers might like to see to help them teach the Korean War. These included insights on the continuation of the war referenced earlier in this report. They also included a need for resources to help students to see the Korean War in the wider context of geopolitics and the Cold War in Asia. Our Fellows were also keen to explore the significance, impact and legacy of the Korean War for the Korean peninsula and for the region and indeed world politics. They were also keen to explore the personal experiences of soldiers and civilians in the war.

All of these angles will be explored in the coming weeks and we will be keeping you up to date with further posts and reflections from the Fellows as their learning and expertise develops.