

“The past is never dead. It’s not even past.”

-William Faulkner

When I first began researching topics for National History Day, I wanted a topic that addressed both conflict and compromise. As I struggled to find the perfect topic, a story that seemed to be lost in the pages of history found me: the story of the Korean War. It piqued my interest mainly because of today’s global tensions, which only added to the complexity. I was immersed in the connections between past and present. Korea’s tale is not just a simple battle story and the many layers begged to be dug into. I was hooked.

I knew that Korea divided, but I didn’t know why or how. I knew North Korea was a nuclear power, but I was curious how it came to power. I wondered what role America played in the conflict almost seventy years ago. With so many questions, I needed to focus on one aspect of the war. As I found secondary sources and tried to narrow my choice, I found my view was actually getting wider. Placing the Korean War within the broader scope of the Cold War highlighted another conflict: one between communism and capitalism. The larger theme of conflict and compromise then guided the rest of my research. I examined government documents, maps, and newsreels from the 1950s to truly understand the global tensions and their impacts. Collections of photographs, like those from the Atlantic, and interviews with veterans, like George Tate and Chuck Michael, truly brought my research to life and allowed me to live the war through their eyes.

I knew documentary was the right medium because it allows viewers to be transported, unlike a “two-dimensional” piece. Documentaries capture a deeper story by integrating music, pacing, footage, and cultural elements that other media cannot. Film was also compelling

because of the availability of primary source footage and images from the Korean War. I created animated maps to visually convey military advances and act as a geographical reference. Music and graphics highlight contrast throughout Korea's history. War brings death, destruction, and stillness, whereas moving pictures show life and progress. My words act as the fabric from which a quilt is created, but I most enjoy the challenge of weaving together different elements to tell a story that words alone cannot tell.

Originally, I was unaware of how deeply conflict and compromise equally shaped Korea. But this cycle had impacts I could never imagine. Korea was a unified peninsula, but it was soon caught in a tug-of-war between nations and ideologies. Each "final" compromise seemed to be the beginning of yet another conflict and the cycle still hasn't ceased. The Korean Peninsula is the center of a never-ending circle of conflict and compromise. Before April 27th of this year, the prospect of conflict was more prominent than the prospect of compromise. Now the tides have changed as easily as they did at Inchon. We are living in a past that never dies.