

*Remarks read by Dr. Won Kwang Paik (Professor Emeritus, Political Science, Central Michigan University), at the 2026 Plaques of Honor Ceremony, Island Park, Mt. Pleasant, Michigan (September 18, 2026)

Introductory Remark for Private First-Class Robert Fletcher: U.S. Army Private First-Class Robert Fletcher was born in Ypsilanti on December 2, 1932. He enlisted in the Army in May 1950. After five weeks of training, he was sent to Japan to join the Twenty-Fourth Infantry Regiment. Known as “The Buffalo Soldiers,” all the enlisted men were African Americans in the still segregated U.S. Army. His unit was one of the first to enter the Korean War on July 10, 1950. They were involved in heavy fighting with high casualties in the battle of Daejeon. According to Fletcher, “The company went in with 250 men; within a few weeks, all but eighteen were killed. The North Korean wanted Korea—their objective was all of Korea by September 1, so they were hitting us very hard.” But despite these losses, Fletcher’s regiments helped turn the tide for the American, after the famous Inchon Landing on September 15, and began to destroy North Korean Army in September and November. Then, the company encountered heavy Chinese communist troops, and after running out of ammunition and food, Private Fletcher was captured by the Chinese army near the border of China on November 27, 1950. He suffered from extreme hunger, cold, and physical and psychological abuse which led to the death of thousands. Of the over 7,000 American soldiers taken prisoner, about 40 percent (about 3,000) died in captivity. Fletcher told later, “I was 180 pounds, and I went down to about 90 pounds...I don’t know why I survived.” As the Korean War ended, he was released from the POW camp on August 8, 1953. Fletcher remembered “That was the greatest day of my life. I looked up at the American flag, and it was blowing in the wind...and it was the prettiest thing I’d ever seen.” After returning from the Korean War, Private Fletcher suffered from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD, but he was dedicated to veteran’s issues, especially former POWs, and served over 20 years on the Congressional Advisory Board for former POWs. Fletcher passed away, age 85, in Ann Arbor on February 12, 2018.

And today, on September 19, 2026, more than 74 years after his release from the POW camp, it is my honor and privilege to present the *Korean Ambassador for Peace Medal* to

Private First-Class Robert Fletcher, given by the government of the Republic of Korea for those served in Korean War. Private Fletcher's sacrifice and service make him truly an American hero and patriot until the end. Thank you, Private Fletcher, and rest in peace.