



The Department of Defense 60th Anniversary of the Korean War Commemoration Committee

HISTORY OF THE KOREAN WAR

At the close of World War II in 1945, the Soviet Union occupied Korea north of the 38th parallel and the United States occupied Korea south of the 38th parallel. The Soviets imposed a communist government, known as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), while the United States put in place a nationalist/capitalist democracy, known as the Republic of Korea (ROK).

Originally, the intention of the U.S. and Soviet Union was to establish a stable unified Korea and to withdraw their military forces, however Cold War tensions caused events to play out differently.

THE INVASION

On June 25th, 1950, North Korea launched a surprise attack on South Korea, using tanks, planes and overwhelming numbers of troops. The South Korean army was no match for the more experienced and better equipped North Koreans and the ROK (Republic of Korea) forces crumbled.

By the evening of June 28, 1950, the South Korean capital of Seoul had fallen and ROK forces were in disarray. South Korea appealed to the United Nations for help. The U.N. Security Council called for an immediate end to hostilities and passed Resolution 82, authorizing force to be used in Korea.

Twenty-one of the U.N. member states agreed to contribute arms, money and/or troops to rid South Korea of its North Korean aggressor. General Douglas MacArthur was placed in command of the U.N. forces, which included combat and medical units from 22 nations.

THE PUSHBACK

The initial U.N. forces were unable to slow the advance of the North Korean forces and fought desperate delaying operations until more U.N. troops could arrive in South Korea. By the end of July 1950, the North Koreans had contained the U.N. forces in a perimeter around the Port of Pusan, an area in the southeast corner of the Korean peninsula.

General MacArthur launched an offensive amphibious invasion near Seoul at the Port of Inchon changing the course of the war. American forces quickly gained control of Inchon and recaptured Seoul within days, cutting the North Korean supply line. Simultaneously, American and ROK forces in Pusan broke out of the Pusan perimeter and pursued fleeing DPRK forces north.

General MacArthur pushed U.N. forces north towards the Yalu River. Ignoring evidence



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that Chinese forces had moved across the Yalu River into North Korea, MacArthur assured U.S. troops that they would be “home by Christmas.”

MacArthur further risked his forces by splitting his troops, with the X Corps advancing along the eastern coast and the Eighth Army advancing along the western coast.

THE CHINESE OFFENSIVE

The overextended U.S. forces unexpectedly ran into approximately 180,000 Chinese troops, which had infiltrated across the North Korean border from China. The right flank of the Eighth Army (U.S.) was shattered and the X Corps (U.S.) fought a desperate struggle near the Chosin Reservoir. U.N. troops were evacuated back to the Pusan perimeter and Seoul was re-captured by Chinese forces.

On November 28, 1950, a shaken MacArthur informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the U.N. forces faced an “entirely new war.”

STALEMATE AT THE 38TH

Beginning January 25, Lieutenant General Matthew Ridgway (in command of the U.S. Eighth Army) led the U.N. forces in a slow advance northward. They inflicted heavy casualties on the Chinese and North Korean troops and captured Seoul once again.

Tensions increased between President Truman and General MacArthur during this period and on April 10, 1951, Truman relieved MacArthur of command. He was replaced by General Ridgway. The fighting largely fell into a stalemate along the 38th Parallel and remained that way throughout 1952-1953 as both sides looked for a way to end hostilities.

ARMISTICE

On July 27th, 1953, an armistice agreement was signed and at 10 pm that night there was a cease fire. Hostilities were over – three years and one month after fighting began. And even though there is a truce, a peace agreement has never been signed.

