

# Korean War - facts, figures & trivia

A few facts, figures and trivia about the Korean War, a war often referred to as the 'Forgotten War'.

On 25 June, 1950 the 'Cold War' became 'hot' when North Korea launched an invasion against its neighbour to the South following a series of clashes along the border

The United Nations, with the United States as the principal force, came to the aid of South Korea. China came to the aid of North Korea, and the Soviet Union also gave some assistance to the North.

The war would last from 25 June, 1950 to 27 July, 1953 and would cost more than five million dead, wounded or missing.

When an armistice was signed on 27 July, 1953, the agreement created the Korean Demilitarized Zone to separate North and South Korea, and allowed the return of prisoners. However, no peace treaty has been signed, and according to some sources the two Koreas are technically still at war.

## Korean War Trivia

- The Korean War began on June 25, 1950, when 75,000 North Korean soldiers poured over the 38th parallel into South Korea to impose communism on its neighbour.
- The Korean War began at 04h30. on June 25, 1950, and ended on July 27, 1953. There are still more than 7,000 U.S. soldiers missing in action from the war.
- The North Korean film *Unsung Heroes*(1978) glorifies

members of the North Korean military while depicting war crimes by South Korea and the U.S. In its cast were several U.S. soldiers who had defected to North Korea.

- The Korean War took a heavy toll—up to a total of five million dead, wounded, or missing, and half of them civilians.
- Although actual hostilities during the Korean War ended on July 27, 1953, Congress lengthened the war period to January 31, 1955, to extend benefit eligibility for soldiers because peace was so uncertain after the 1953 peace negotiations.
- The Korean War was the first military action of the Cold War.
- Compared to WW II, there are few movies about the Korean War. Some of the most well-known include *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962), *Pork Chop Hill* (1959), and *Birthday Boy* (2004).
- North Koreans who were born after the Korean War in the late 1950s are on average about two inches shorter than South Koreans.
- In March 2013, North Korea declared the 1953 armistice that rendered the Korean War invalid.
- There were 6.8 million American men and women who served during the Korean War period, from June

27, 1950, to January 31, 1955. There were 54,200 American deaths during the period of hostilities (June 27, 1950 - July 27, 1953). Of these, 33,700 were actual battle deaths.

- The U.S. dropped more bombs in Korea (635,000 tons, as well as 32,557 tons of napalm) than in the entire Pacific theatre during WW II.
- One of the most embarrassing incidents during the Korean War was when U.S. Army Brigadier General Francis Townsend Dodd was held hostage by North Korean POWs during a camp uprising. The incident led to a North Korean propaganda victory, and Dodd suffered career-ending embarrassment.
- Although millions of people died during the Korean War, no one side can claim it won the war. At best, South Korea can claim that it stopped North Korea from taking over and turning it into a communist nation. Both countries still remain divided, and North Korea is still a communist nation.
- Months before the North Korean army crossed the 38th parallel, the CIA noted that North Korean troops were moving south. The CIA, however, did not take any action and viewed the movement as a "defensive measure."



**DIVIDING LINE:** The 38th Parallel marked the border between North and South Korea.

- Officially, the Korean War was never more than a "police action" because President Truman never asked Congress for a formal declaration of war.
- During the war, North Korea was supported by the Soviet Union (Russia) and the People's Republic of China, both communist countries.
- Both Russia and The People's Republic of China were members of the United Nations Security Council. Yet both supported North Korea, who were fighting against the United Nations forces.
- During the Korean War, South Korea was supported by the United States, Great Britain, and the United Nations, which all supported democracy and opposed communism.
- Even though 16 countries participated in the Korean War, it is still not considered a "world war." Fifteen Unit-

- ed Nations countries sent combat troops to Korea: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Colombia, Ethiopia, France, Great Britain, Greece, Holland, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Philippines, South Africa, Thailand, and Turkey. Four countries sent medical assistance: India, Italy, Norway, and Sweden.
- During the Korean War, like in other wars, prostitutes were available and became more available the farther back from the front line a soldier was. Venereal diseases were a constant fear of the military, and many men contracted them.
- During the Korean War, the South Korean government provided women for its troops. According to one account, the government standard of performance for such women was to service at least 29 men a day. Intercourse should not last longer than 30 minutes so the pros-

titute could move on to other men and make the maximum daily profit. There is heated and ongoing debate about how much the U.S. military was involved in providing prostitutes for its men.

- A little-known hero of the Korean War has been immortalized by a statue. The mare known as "Sgt. Reckless" brought ammunition to soldiers during the war and carried wounded men off the battlefield. The heroic horse is on display in the National Museum of the Marine Corps.
- The U.S. Army used approximately 1,500 dogs during the Korean War and 4,000 in the Vietnam War.
- During 1953, the soldiers of the U.S. Army I Corps donated \$385,000 to Korean relief charities. The 45th Infantry Division contributed \$300,000 to Korean relief organizations.
- After the Korean War, 21 American soldiers chose to stay with their Chinese captors. Hailed in China as "Peace Fighters," in America they were denounced as turncoats and traitors. The U.S. media claimed the soldiers were brainwashed by their captors. Most of them later recanted their statements and returned to America.
- There were 7,245 American POWs during the Korean War. Of these, 2,806 died while in captivity and 4,418 were eventually returned to military control. Twenty-one refused repatriation.
- An estimated 86,300 Kore-



an War veterans are women, making up 7% of the estimated number of all female veterans.

- Approximately 848,000 Korean War veterans also served in other war periods: 171,000 in both WW II and Vietnam; 404,000 in WW II only; and 273,000 in Vietnam only.
- The top five states with the most Korean War veterans are 1) California (430,800); 2) Florida (294,000); 3) Texas (243,300); 4) New York (220,100); and 5) Pennsylvania (201,400).
- Many soldiers died of frostbite during the Korean War before ever reaching the battlefields. The temperature in some areas fell below zero for long periods of time.
- According to the 1990 Census, of the 4.9 million Korean War veterans in the U.S., 4.5 million (92%) were white; 339,400 (7%) were African American; 30,400 (less than 1%) were American Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut; 39,300 (less than 1%) were Pacific

Islander; and 35,000 were of other races. There were an estimated 133,500 Hispanic (who may be of any race) Korean War veterans.

- It was during the Korean War that the intravenous use of amphetamines was first reported. Some soldiers had developed the habit of mixing heroin with amphetamines and injecting the combination. A significant number of servicemen returning from the Korean War brought back the habit with them.
- The highest-ranking U.S. officer captured by North Korean troops was Major General William F. Dean in the Battle of Taejon on July 22, 1950.
- The highest-ranking U.S. Military officer to die in the Korean War died in an accident. Lt. General Walton H. Walker died when a truck hit his jeep on December 23, 1950.
- Commander-in-Chief of the United Nations Command, U.S. Army General Mark

Clark signed the armistice for the United States that ended the Korean War on July 27, 1953.

- The world's first all-jet dogfight occurred during the Korean War on September 8, 1950.
- During the Korean War, the United States Army and the United Nations forces were led by General Douglas MacArthur and, later, General Matthew Ridgway. The North Korean forces were led by Choi-Yong-kun.
- The United States still keeps troops in South Korea in case North Korea ever attempts to invade again.
- Pablo Picasso's 1951 *Massacre in Korea* depicts acts of mass killing carried out by North Koreans, South Koreans, and American forces in the town of Sinchon (in North Korea) during the war. It is considered one of Picasso's communist works and echoes Francisco Goya's *The Third of May*.
- The capital of South Korea, Seoul, changed hands four



**DOG FIGHT:** The Korean War saw the very first dogfights between fighter jets. North American F-86 Sabre jets came up against Russian Mikoyan-Gurevich MiG-15 jets.

times during the Korean War. It was first captured by the North Koreans on June 28, 1950, and then retaken by UN forces that September. The Chinese seized the city in January 1951, but gave it up two months later.

- MASH (Mobile Army Surgical Hospital) units were first used in the Korean War. Their aim was to be closer to the combat zones to save more soldiers' lives.
- The Korean War did not receive as much media attention as WW II and the Vietnam War. Consequently, it has been called the "The Forgotten War" or the "Unknown War."
- In South Korea, the war is called "625" or the "6-2-5 Upheaval," which refers to the day North Korea invaded South Korea, June 25.
- In North Korea, the war is called the "Fatherland Liberation War" or the "Korean War."
- One of the most brutal battles of the Korean War was the Battle of Chosin Reservoir, fought from November 27 to December 13, 1950. What made it different from other fierce fighting was

the intensely cold and bitter weather. Temperatures dropped to -54° F. One survivor of the battle designed a bumper sticker that read: "Once Upon a Time Hell Froze Over. We Were There."

- In China, the Korean War is called "The War to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea."
- The most famous representation of the Korean War is the television series "M\*A\*S\*H," which ran from 1972 to 1983. Its final episode was the most watched in TV history. The television series lasted 11 years, eight years longer than the actual war.
- The United States entered the Korean War for two main reasons: 1) to protect South Korea and prevent communists from taking over other countries and 2) to protect Japan, which the U.S. thought would be next on the list of countries that the communists wanted to invade.
- Initially, the U.S. wanted to defend South Korea, but later in the war, Truman convinced the UN that it

was time to liberate North Korea as well. Under Gen. MacArthur's leadership, U.S. and UN troops gained control of most of North Korea. When China entered the war, MacArthur wanted to keep fighting despite China's overwhelming numbers. Truman fired MacArthur and replaced him with Gen. Matthew Ridgway, who had a much more conservative plan that included just defending South Korea. Even after the Korean War, North Korea remains the most hardline communist state in the world.

- There were 131 Medals of Honor awarded during the Korean War.
- Up until WW II, Korea had been one nation, known as the Korean Peninsula, and was part of Japan. After WW II, the winners of the war divided it into two countries. The Soviet Union took the northern half, and the U.S. took control of the southern half. It was divided at the 38th parallel.
- During the first few weeks of the Korean War, the U.S. rushed a new weapon into service to provide an effec-

**TV HIT:** The television sitcom MASH, set in the Korean War, lasted eight years longer than the actual war.





tive counter to North Korean armour: M-20 bazooka. It was nicknamed “super-bazooka” and could fire a larger, 3.5-inch rocket capable of penetrating North Korean armour.

- At the end of the conflict, the combatants signed a cease-fire at 10h00. on July 27, 1953. There was not a treatise or an official end to the Korean War.
- Ethiopia, Belgium, and Columbia all supplied battalion-sized detachments that fought along U.S. and other UN forces in the Korean War.
- The most powerful tank to see action in the Korean War was the 67-ton British Centurion with a 105 mm main gun.
- The top-scoring American flying ace of the Korean War was Air Force Captain Joseph McConnell. Flying F-86 Sabres, he shot down 16 enemy planes, including three MIG-15s in a single day. He died tragically in a test flight accident in August 1954.
- Roughly a quarter of all Americans killed in action during the Korean War died between August and December 1950, mostly during the battles of the Pusan perimeter, Chosin Reservoir, and Kunu-ri Pass.
- Tensions created by the Korean War led both Presidents Truman and Eisenhower to consider dropping a nuclear war on Korea. With strategic missiles and thermonuclear (hydrogen) bombs still in testing, the bombs that



**DEBUT:** The helicopter played an important role in the war. It was used not only to evacuate casualties, but was used to carry troops into combat zones.

would have been dropped were atomic bombs delivered by B-47s, similar in yield to the 1945 bombs. Both presidents ultimately decided not to drop the bombs because they were afraid of starting WW III.

- In occupied areas of North Korea, the North Korean Army executed every educated person (such as those who held education, government, and religious positions) who could lead a resistance against North Korea.
- After what seemed to be a stalemate, on July 17, 1953, both sides signed a treaty to end the Korean War. Little had changed due to the war. Both countries remained separate and the border remain at the 38th parallel, with a 3,2 km wide demilitarized zone between the two countries to act as a buffer to

prevent further wars.

- On June 28, 1950, just days after the start of the Korean War, South Korean President Syngman Rhee ordered the Bodo League Massacre, which resulted in the deaths of more than 100,000 suspected communist sympathizers and their families in South Korea.
- Because North Koreans would fight UN forces by disguising its soldiers as refugees who would ask UN forces for food and help and then open fire and attack, U.S. soldiers adopted a “shoot first, ask questions later” policy against anyone looking like a civilian refugee approaching U.S. battlefields.
- The United States lacked a guerrilla warfare capability at the start of the Korean War, and had to put one together, and fast. The result was the



**FIRED:** General Douglas MacArthur was fired by US President Harry Truman for being too aggressive. He was replaced by General Matthew Ridgway who was more conservative.

8240th Army Unit, comprised of Rangers and other soldiers with unconventional warfare experience from World War II. They advised indigenous “partisan

forces” in Korea on how to fight behind enemy lines to undermine the North Korean Army. In 1952, soldiers with the new designation of “Special Forces” graduated

from the U.S. Army Psychological Warfare Center and School, and supplemented the 8240th. At its height, the unit advised 38,000 partisan fighters.

- The paratroopers of the 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team (known as the “Rakkasans”) conducted all of the airborne operations of the Korean War. They jumped into Sunch’ŏn, North Korea in 1950, and Munsan-ni, South Korea in 1952. The Rakkasans fought in a total of six campaigns in Korea. Today, the unit’s heirs are part of 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault).

