


**WITNESS HISTORY** AUDIO

**They Won't Escape This Time**

General Lewis B. Puller was the only U.S. marine in history to win five Navy Crosses. Since the time he enlisted in 1918, Puller had fought in Haiti and Nicaragua, commanded marines in China, and waded ashore island after island in the Pacific during World War II. Pinned down by a surprise communist Chinese attack into North Korea, badly outnumbered, and cut off from reinforcement, Puller retained his courage and humor. He informed his regiment:

“The enemy is in front of us, behind us, to the left of us, and to the right of us. They won't escape this time.”

—Lewis “Chesty” Puller, November 1950

▲ American machine-gunners in Korea

# The Korean War

**Objectives**

- Explain how Mao Zedong and the communists gained power in China.
- Describe the causes and progress of the war in Korea.
- Identify the long-term effects of the Korean War.

**Terms and People**

Jiang Jieshi  
Mao Zedong  
38th parallel

Douglas MacArthur  
limited war  
SEATO

**NoteTaking**

**Reading Skill: Categorize** As you read, note problems and the steps that President Truman took to solve them. Use a problem-solution table like the one below.

Problem	Solution
Communists threaten takeover of China	

**Why It Matters** Europe had been the first focus of the Cold War. But in the early 1950s, U.S. involvement in the Korean War made East Asia the prime battleground in the long, hard Cold War struggle. The division between North and South Korea remains a source of international tension today. **Section Focus Question:** How did President Truman use the power of the presidency to limit the spread of communism in East Asia?

## Communists Gain Control of China

Since the time of the Russian Revolution in 1917, the Soviets had hoped to spread communism to every corner of the world, training foreigners in Marxist theory and revolutionary strategy. The Soviets were confident that communism would reach worldwide influence. In 1949, events in China seemed to justify their confidence.

**Civil War Divides China** Before Japan invaded China in 1937, Nationalist leader **Jiang Jieshi** (zhēe AHNG zhī SHEE), known in the United States as Chiang Kai-shek, had been fighting a civil war against communists led by **Mao Zedong** (mow zeh DUHNG). Although Jiang and Mao temporarily joined forces in an uneasy alliance to fight Japan, the civil war resumed with a new fury after the war ended.

The Soviet Union supported Mao, while the United States sent several billion dollars in aid to Jiang. American leaders feared that Jiang's defeat would create a communist superpower spanning most of Asia.

Jiang's regime proved unequal to the task. Nationalist generals were reluctant to fight. And, while masses of Chinese people faced starvation, corrupt officials diverted U.S. aid dollars into their own pockets. By promising to feed the people, Mao won increased support.

**Communists Win in China** In 1948, Mao's forces dominated the war. Jiang appealed for American military intervention. However, the U.S. government had no intention of sending American troops to support the corrupt Jiang. In 1949, Jiang fled the Chinese mainland, taking control of the large offshore island of Taiwan. Mao's communists then took control of the world's most populous country, renaming it the People's Republic of China.

Mao's victory was an immense shock to Americans. Not only was China under the control of sworn enemies of the United States, but communist regimes controlled about one fourth of the world's landmass and one third of its population. "Who lost China?" Americans asked. Many critics blamed the Truman administration, saying that the United States had failed to give enough support to Jiang. But Secretary of State Dean Acheson argued:

#### Primary Source

"The unfortunate but inescapable fact is that the ominous result of the civil war in China was beyond the control of the government of the United States. Nothing that this country did or could have done within the reasonable limits of its capabilities could have changed the result."

—Secretary of State Dean Acheson, "White Paper on China," August 1949



**Checkpoint** Why were the communists able to win the Chinese Civil War?



#### Communist Victory in China

Carrying hundreds of pictures of their leader, Mao Zedong, these Chinese communists celebrate the defeat of Jiang Jieshi in 1949.

## Americans Fight in Korea

The focus of attention turned to the peninsula of Korea, separated from north-east China by the Yalu River. Once controlled by Japan, Korea had been divided into two independent countries by the United States and the Soviet Union after World War II. The dividing line was set at the **38th parallel** of latitude. In North Korea, the Soviets installed a communist government and equipped its armed forces. The United States provided smaller amounts of aid to noncommunist South Korea.

**North Korea Invades South Korea** American occupation troops remained in South Korea until June 1949. Their departure coincided with the communist victory in China. Soon after, North Korea began a major military buildup.

On June 25, 1950, North Korean forces attacked across the 38th parallel. The 90,000 North Korean troops were armed with powerful tanks and other Soviet weapons. Within days, the northerners overtook the South Korean capital city of Seoul and set out after the retreating South Korean army.

**U.S. Forces Defend South Korea** President Truman remembered how the policy of appeasement had failed to check the German aggression that sparked World War II. Determined that history would not repeat itself, he announced that the United States would aid South Korea.

Within days, the UN Security Council unanimously voted to follow Truman's lead, recommending that "the Members of the United Nations furnish such assistance to the Republic of Korea as may be necessary to repel the armed attack and to restore international peace and security in the area." Undoubtedly, the Soviet Union would have used its veto power to block the UN resolution if it had been present for the vote. However, it had been boycotting Security Council sessions because the UN had refused to seat Mao's People's Republic of China.

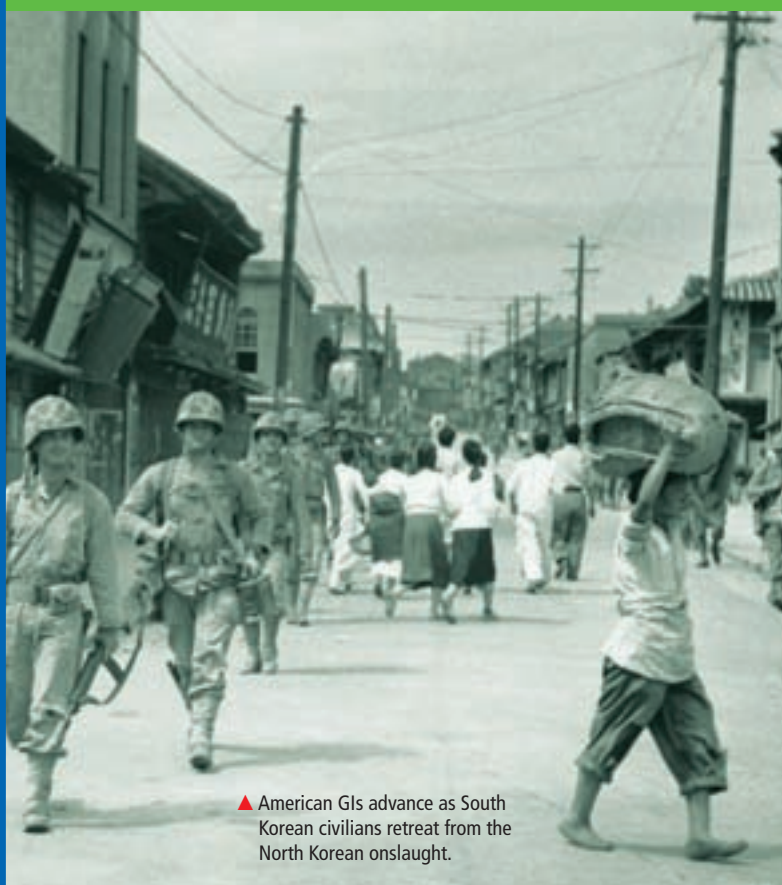
Truman did not ask Congress for a formal declaration of war, as required by the Constitution. However, supported by the UN resolution, Truman ordered American troops who were stationed in Japan to move to South Korea. The soldiers were mainly occupation troops who had not been trained for forced marches in monsoon rains or heavy combat in rice paddies, nor did they have the military equipment needed to stop the invasion. Soon, they joined their South Korean allies in retreating to the southeast corner of the peninsula near the city of Pusan. There, the allies held fast. As fresh supplies and troops arrived from Japan, soldiers from other UN countries joined the American and South Korean forces.

**MacArthur Drives Back the North Koreans** By September 1950, the UN forces were ready to counterattack. General **Douglas MacArthur**, the World War II hero, had a bold plan to drive the invaders from South Korea. He suspected that the rapid advance of North Korean troops had left North Korea with limited supply lines. He decided to strike at this weakness by launching a surprise attack on the port city of Inchon, well behind enemy lines. Because Inchon was such a poor landing site, with swift currents and treacherous tides, MacArthur knew that the enemy would not expect an attack there.

## The Korean War

Geography Interactive

For: Interactive map  
Web Code: nep-1204



▲ American GIs advance as South Korean civilians retreat from the North Korean onslaught.

### North Korea Invades



1

June 1950  
North Korea  
invades South  
Korea.

2

July 1950  
U.S. and South Korean  
forces halt their  
retreat near Pusan.

MacArthur's bold gamble paid off handsomely. On the morning of September 15, 1950, U.S. Marines landed at Inchon and launched an attack into the rear guard of the North Koreans. Communist forces began fleeing for the North Korean border. By October 1950, the North Koreans had been driven north of the 38th parallel.

With the retreat of North Korean forces, U.S. officials had to decide what to do next. Should they declare their UN mandate accomplished and end the war? Or should they send their forces north of the 38th parallel and punish the communists for the invasion? Truman was concerned about the action China would take if the United States carried the war into North Korea. Chinese leaders publicly warned the Americans not to advance near its borders. But MacArthur did not take this warning seriously. He assured Truman that China would not intervene in the war. Based on this advice, the United States pushed a resolution through the UN, calling for a "unified, independent, and democratic" Korea.

**China Forces a Stalemate** Highly confident, MacArthur attacked north of the 38th parallel. Despite mountainous terrain and freezing temperatures, by Thanksgiving the Allied advance had reached the Chinese border at the Yalu River. Then, on November 25, 1950, some 300,000 Chinese soldiers attacked

### Vocabulary Builder

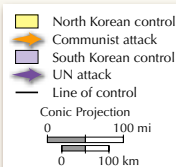
**intervene**—(ihn ter VEEN) *v.* to become involved in; to take action to settle a dispute or influence a course of action

**Map Skills** During the Korean War, UN troops supported South Korea, while China backed North Korea. Advantage seesawed between the two sides.

**1. Locate:** (a) 38th parallel, (b) Pusan, (c) Inchon, (d) Yalu River

**2. Movement** Describe the movement of communist troops after November 1950.

**3. Compare** How does the first map differ from the last one?



### UN Fights Back



**3**

Sept. 15, 1950  
UN forces land at  
Inchon and break  
out of Pusan.

**4**

Nov. 24, 1950  
MacArthur starts  
offensive toward  
Yalu River.

### China Enters the War



**5**

Nov. 25, 1950  
Chinese attack. UN  
and South Korean  
forces retreat.

**6**

Jan. 10, 1951  
Communists  
push UN forces  
to 37th parallel.

### Stalemate



**7**

Jan. 16, 1951  
UN forces push  
communists back  
to 38th parallel.

**8**

June 27, 1951  
Cease-fire is  
signed, with border  
at 38th parallel.

## Vocabulary Builder

**confront**—(kuhn FRUHNT) *v.* to face

South Korean and U.S. positions. Badly outnumbered, the UN troops were forced back.

With China now in the war, the United States **confronted** a major land war in Asia. It was possible that this war could not be won without huge commitments of troops and even atomic weapons. Truman steadfastly ruled out both of these options. MacArthur, who favored an invasion of China, was enraged. He distrusted Truman's policy of a **limited war** fought to achieve only specific goals. As a soldier, MacArthur favored total victory.

Unable to sway Truman, the general sent a letter to the House Republican leader attacking the President's policies. After the letter became public, Truman fired MacArthur for insubordination. There was a huge outcry in the United States, and MacArthur returned home a national hero.

✓ **Checkpoint** How did President Truman react to the North Korean invasion of South Korea?

## The Korean War Has Lasting Effects

By the spring of 1951, Allied forces had regrouped and stabilized their position near the 38th parallel. The stalemate lasted until 1953. During that time, the two sides fought small, bloody battles with limited results. At the same time, diplomats tried to devise an acceptable peace agreement.

**The War Becomes a Political Issue** The stalemate was a key issue in the presidential election of 1952. Republican candidate Dwight D. Eisenhower promised that if elected he would end the war. Upon his election, he visited Korea, spoke with the troops, and studied the enemy's fortifications.

### Decision Point

## Should the United States Invade China?

China's troops advanced, driving U.S. soldiers and marines back into South Korea.

General Douglas MacArthur favored a strong response that included an invasion of China.

President Truman disagreed. Read the options below. Then, you decide.

### MacArthur Favors Invasion

#### Primary Source

"I made it clear that if not permitted to destroy the enemy built-up bases north of the Yalu, if not permitted to utilize the friendly Chinese force of some 600,000 men on Formosa [Taiwan], if not permitted to blockade the China coast . . . the position of the command from the military standpoint forbade victory."

—General Douglas MacArthur,  
April 19, 1951



### Truman Opposes Invasion

#### Primary Source

"We do not want to see the conflict in Korea extended. We are trying to prevent a world war—not to start one. . . . Why can't we take other steps to punish the aggressor? Why don't we bomb Manchuria and China itself? Why don't we assist Chinese Nationalist troops to land on mainland China? If we were to do these things we would . . . become entangled in a vast conflict on the continent of Asia. . . ."

—President Truman,  
April 11, 1951

#### You Decide

1. Why did MacArthur want to invade China?
2. Why did Truman oppose invasion?
3. What decision would you have made? Why?

## Korean War's Impact on America

## Quick Study

### Immediate Effects

- 37,000 Americans killed
- 103,000 Americans wounded
- Relations with China worsen
- Armed forces racially integrated

### Long-Term Effects

- Military spending increases
- Military commitments increase worldwide
- Relations with Japan improve
- Future presidents send military into combat without Congressional approval

Eisenhower became convinced that only strong action would break the stalemate. When peace talks threatened to fail, he hinted that he might introduce nuclear weapons into the conflict. That warning, along with the death of Joseph Stalin, convinced the communists to settle the conflict. On July 27, 1953, after slightly more than three years of fighting, the two sides signed a cease-fire. That cease-fire is still in effect today.

**Examining the Lessons of the Korean War** There was no victory in the Korean War. North Korea remained a communist country allied to China and the Soviet Union, and South Korea stayed a noncommunist country allied to the United States and the major democracies. The two Koreas remained divided at about the 38th parallel.

Yet, the war had an important long-term result. Truman had committed U.S. troops to battle without a congressional declaration of war. This set a precedent that future Presidents would follow. The Korean War also led to increased military spending. By 1960, military spending accounted for nearly half of the federal budget. More than a million U.S. soldiers were stationed around the world.

A new alliance underscored U.S. interest in Asia. Like NATO, the **Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO)** was a defensive alliance aimed at preventing the spread of communism. Its members included Pakistan, Thailand, the Philippines, Australia, New Zealand, France, Britain, and the United States.



**Checkpoint** What were the most important results of U.S. participation in the Korean War?



### U.S. Troops Remain in Korea

American soldiers have stayed in Korea since the war. They patrol the border between the Koreas to prevent another North Korean invasion of South Korea.

## SECTION

# 2 Assessment

## Progress Monitoring Online

For: Self-test with vocabulary practice  
Web Code: nea-1205

### Comprehension

**1. Terms and People** What is the relationship between each of the following items and American policy in East Asia?

- Jiang Jieshi
- Mao Zedong
- 38th parallel
- limited war
- SEATO

### 2. NoteTaking Reading Skill:

**Categorize** Use your problem-solution table to answer the Section Focus Question: How did President Truman use the power of the presidency to limit the spread of communism in East Asia?

### Writing About History

#### 3. Quick Write: Plan an Interview

Suppose that you were going to interview some American veterans of the Korean War. Write five questions that you might ask about their experiences and their views of the war.

### Critical Thinking

**4. Identify Central Issues** Why did American aid to Jiang's Nationalists fail to prevent Mao's communists from taking control of China?

**5. Demonstrate Reasoned Judgment** How did General MacArthur's decision to advance toward the Yalu River change the course of the Korean War?

**6. Identify Central Issues** How did the way in which Truman handled the Korean crisis affect the powers of the presidency?