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**Conspicuous Publicity: How the White House and the Army used the Medal
of Honor in the Korean War**

A Thesis Presented for
the Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

David Glenn Williams
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To my wife

Kelly Williams

And my boys

Tyler Williams

Noah Williams

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Abstract

During the Korean War the White House and the Army publicized the Medal of Honor to achieve three outcomes. First, they hoped it would have a positive influence on public opinion. Truman committed to limited goals at the start of the war and chose not to create an official propaganda agency, which led to partisan criticism and realistic reporting. Medal of Honor publicity celebrated individual actions removed from their wider context in a familiar, heroic mold to alter memory of the past. Second, the Army publicized the Medal of Honor internally to inspire and reinforce desired soldier behavior. Early reports indicated a serious lack of discipline on the front lines and the Army hoped to build psychological resilience in the men by exposing them to the heroic actions of other soldiers. Finally, the Cold War spawned a great fear of communist subterfuge in the United States, which was exacerbated by the brainwashing of prisoners of war. The White House and the Army reached out to marginalized elements of American society through the Medal of Honor to counter communist propaganda.

The Korean War remains an understudied era of American history, yet it was incredibly important to the United States and the world. The war influenced the United States to maintain a large standing military prepositioned around the world to protect its interests. Achieving the status quo antebellum validated the containment strategy against communism, which heavily influenced the decision to intervene in Vietnam. The United Nations, ostensibly in charge of allied forces in the Korean War, gained credibility from preventing the loss of South Korea. Despite these important effects of the war on world history, scholars continue to focus on World War II and Vietnam. This study seeks to build on the relative dearth of scholarly material on the Korean War by examining in historical context the manipulation of a symbol that intersected both the military and the home-front to influence behavior.

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Introduction

Americans believed in heroes in 1950, and they desperately needed one in July of that year. The North Korean People's Army (NKPA) mauled American ground troops in July and August, and reports from the front lines reflected the bad news. President Harry S. Truman attempted to reshape public memory of those first disastrous months by announcing that Major General William F. Dean had won the Medal of Honor (MOH). The timing of the announcement was conspicuous because Dean was missing in action, but neither the White House nor the U. S. Army was thinking about an award presentation at that time. The announcement also capitalized on positive front line reports from the successful Inchon landing and restoration of the South Korean government in Seoul. The White House approved the MOH for General Dean to recognize his individual actions, but also to influence public opinion by offering an alternative, positive memory of July 1950. Throughout the war, the White House and the Army shaped MOH publicity to alter public memory, influence soldier behavior, and counter communist propaganda.

Dean commanded the 24th Infantry Division during the first weeks of the Korean War. Truman's decision to commit ground troops caught the United States Army off-guard, and forced General Douglas MacArthur, commander of U.S. forces in the Pacific, to deploy the 24th Division to South Korea in separate units. He hoped the piecemeal commitment would delay the NKPA assault long enough for him to build sufficient combat power to launch a counterattack. MacArthur charged Dean with executing the initial phases of the delay.¹

¹ Roy E. Appleman, *South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu: June-November 1950* (Washington, D.C.: United States Army Center for Military History, 1992), 59; T.R. Fehrenbach, *This Kind of War: The Classic Korean War History* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 1998), 65-66; William Manchester, *American Caesar: Douglas MacArthur 1880-1964*

Part of the 1st Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Charles B. Smith, spearheaded American intervention in Korea. Task Force Smith detrained at eight o'clock a.m. on July 2, 1950, in Taejon.² General Dean arrived by plane the next day and instructed Smith to establish a defensive position north of Osan. He then ordered the 34th Regiment to establish a support position to the southwest of Smith.³ Dean hoped the presence of his troops would bolster the confidence of the Republic of Korea (ROK) Army forces, but when the NKPA attacked both the Americans and the ROKs disintegrated under pressure. General Dean exhausted himself circulating the battlefield to encourage his men as they retreated south, but on July 19, he personally took charge of defensive measures in Taejon.

Between July 19 and 20, Dean attempted to halt the general ROK and American retreat that started with the North Korean invasion on June 25. Underequipped, underprepared, and shocked by the reality of combat, the American and ROK forces stood little chance against the North Korean's T-34 tanks. To inspire his men, Dean personally organized a bazooka team and hunted tanks in the streets, but the NKPA overran the city nonetheless. Dean gathered his men at nightfall and ordered them to retreat, but his driver made a wrong turn that separated him from the main convoy. His vehicle hit a roadblock that forced his small group of men to hide until the next morning. Dean, who was looking for water for his wounded men during the night, fell down a mountainside, knocking him unconscious. When he awoke, Dean discovered that he was alone

(Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1978), 558; Douglas MacArthur, *Reminiscences* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 336.

² Appleman, *South to the Naktong*, 62.

³ Fehrenbach, 72.

and had a broken shoulder. Dean evaded the NKPA for several weeks until two South Korean farmers betrayed him.⁴

The award of the MOH to General Dean caused some controversy. At least two officers in Dean's command criticized him for forgetting his proper place on the battlefield.⁵ It was then, as it is now, unusual for a division commander to be that close to the front lines. Dean's proper role was to exercise command and control of his subordinate commands, the 21st and 34th Regiments, but instead he personally engaged the enemy in the streets of Taejon. Dean later claimed his actions were meant to inspire his troops, an understandable gesture considering the unabated retreats of the previous two weeks.⁶ Dean's troops had been hastily committed to combat against a better enemy, suffered early defeats, and lost their confidence. He understood that his men looked to him for guidance and example, and he hoped they would respond to his bold actions.

By all accounts, the battle of Taejon was a complete disaster. The NKPA destroyed American lines of communication resulting in confusion and disorderly retreat. They inflicted heavy casualties and captured the American division commander. Worse still, the NKPA advance was delayed by only seven hours. Nevertheless, newspaper articles announcing the award of the MOH to Dean just two and a half months later described a brave hero leading a small force against overwhelming odds. The stories teleologically connected Dean's individual actions to the eventual American success at Inchon. Newspapers dutifully reprinted excerpts of the official MOH citation that emphasized heroism, valor, and self-sacrifice to appeal to widely held

⁴ Max Hastings, *The Korean War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 79-80; Clay Blair, *The Forgotten War: America in Korea 1950-1953* (New York: Times Books, 1987), 136-9; Fehrenbach, 98-100.

⁵ Hastings, 80.

⁶ Appleman, *South to the Naktong*, 163; Blair, 1002.

American ideals and self-conceptions. In Dean's case, the White House and the Army used the MOH to offset negative perceptions of the war with an alternative, positive memory of Taejon.

The handling of Dean's case was similar to that of General Jonathan M. Wainwright. The White House awarded the MOH to Wainwright after a heroic last-stand effort against the Japanese during World War II, but there were important contextual differences between the two cases. The U. S. commitment to total war in World War II affected nearly every American and, therefore, garnered general public support. The U. S. government sustained that support, in part, through the employment of official propaganda agencies that worked with the press to create images of the G. I. as a confident and easy-going hero. During the Korean War, however, partisan bickering started as soon as General Dean's troops were committed to the fighting. A majority of Americans supported the broader Cold War against the Soviet Union, but were conflicted over the limited commitment to the Korean War. The lack of an official propaganda agency allowed criticism of the war to circulate, and the press to create a more realistic image of the G. I. as a tragic hero and victim of circumstance.⁷ Part of the appeal of MOH publicity was that it allowed the White House and the Army to present the Korean War in the familiar, heroic mold of World War II.

The White House and the Army used the MOH in three ways during the Korean War. By 1950, the MOH was an accepted symbol of broad American values including courage, individualism, and self-sacrifice. Its publicity, therefore, offered a positive counterbalance to negative public perceptions of the war. The White House and the Army attempted to alter public memory of the past and thereby subtly influence opinion by appealing to the symbolism of the MOH. Second, the Army internally publicized the MOH to inspire and reinforce desired

⁷ Andrew J. Huebner, *The Warrior Image: Soldiers in American Culture From the Second World War to the Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 101-03.

behavior in its soldiers. Senior officials believed this was particularly important because the Army fielded a young, undertrained force in a war that did not garner national support. Third, as Red fears mounted in the U. S., the White House used MOH publicity as counterpropaganda against communism. The White House reinforced American ideals and, reciprocally, defined the communist enemy through the presentation and publicizing of the MOH.

The use of the MOH in this way has not received scholarly attention for several reasons, the most important of which being the sanctity it first earned in World War II. This has created a psychological aversion to deconstructing the award, potentially cheapening the experiences of those who have earned it. The MOH is also part of a rewards system so basic to human nature that it is easy to ignore. Analysis of this aspect of behavior has been limited to the psychology and sociology fields, but has yet to be examined in historical context. Finally, there is a relative dearth of scholarly work on the Korean War.

This thesis examines how the MOH was used to alter memory and influence public opinion, reinforce desired behavior in soldiers, and inoculate Americans against communist propaganda within the historical context of the Korean War. This study does not intend to cheapen the experiences of living recipients nor dishonor those who received the award posthumously. This study provides insights into how the Medal of Honor intersected with both the military and home fronts, how its symbolism influenced people in historical context, and how symbols and language shape memory.

Historiography

The amount of literature devoted to the Korean War is limited relative to World War II and Vietnam. The majority of the writing that does exist is political-military history; the most useful are *South to the Nakdong, North to the Yalu* by Roy A. Appleman, *Korea: The First War We Lost* by Bevin Alexander, and *The Forgotten War* by Clay Blair. Most historians of the Korean War start with Appleman's *South to the Nakdong* for two reasons: it was the first work published in the Army's official Korean War history series, and Appleman is a thorough researcher and able writer. His work describes the first six months of the war in great tactical detail, and is particularly useful for understanding, from a military perspective, just how bad the situation was in the early weeks. Appleman convincingly argues that poor preparation caused poor performance on the battlefield. He finds fault with senior officers on the battlefield, but balances his criticism by acknowledging heroism as well. The main limitation of *South to the Nakdong* is its scope, but it remains an essential source for study of the Korean War.

Published in 1986, *Korea: The First War We Lost* reflects the general disillusionment with war and the U. S. government characteristic of post-Vietnam era writing. Despite this dated view, the book contributes thoughtful analysis of the Chinese perspective of U. S. actions during the war. Alexander argues that the American high command ignored clear warnings from the Chinese that they would intervene if the U. S. crossed north of the 38th parallel. The study synthesizes the major military and political events of 1950-53, and ably demonstrates how they interacted with one another. For example, Alexander argues that the experience of Chinese intervention, and the subsequent political fallout in the U. S., led Truman to restrain the

enthusiasm of military officers for offensive operations even as U. S. forces experienced success on the battlefield in mid-1950.

Blair's *Forgotten War* is perhaps the most influential book yet written on Korea. Besides giving the war its popular moniker, the work presents a thorough analysis of all the military-political aspects of the war including the military and political situation in Korea from 1946 to 1949. He faults the economic policies of the Truman administration during the interwar years for crippling the U. S. military. The administration's real crime, according to Blair, was selling a rhetorical Cold War against communism to the American public without making any real preparations for hot war contingencies. The study blends the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of the war within their political context. The result is a thoroughly readable, and very complete, rendering of U. S. involvement in the Korean War. Though *Forgotten War* is hampered by moral judgments that reflect Blair's disdain for the Vietnam War, the book remains the most complete military history of the war.

The Army's official Korean War history series originally included *Truce Tent and Fighting Front* by Walter G. Hermes, *Policy and Direction* by James F. Schnabel, and *Ebb and Flow* by Billy C. Mossman, all published between 1965 and 1988. *Truce Tent* examines the problem of fighting a limited war so soon after the total war commitment of World War II. Hermes argues that it was difficult to sell stalemate and compromise in Korea when Americans had become accustomed to total victory. He argues that the dismissal of MacArthur and the resulting Congressional hearings sparked policy debates that turned public opinion against the war. More recent scholarship, however, has challenged these assertions. Debate over conduct of the war actually started within the first weeks of the conflict. Republicans frequently attacked the

Truman administration for being soft on communism before and during the war, and the Congressional hearings resulted in increased public support for Truman's limited war policy.

Hermes characterizes the final two years of the war as a stalemate with smaller offensive actions designed to gain diplomatic leverage. Prisoner of war exchange gained importance during armistice negotiations, and his discussion of POWs is particularly strong as it illuminates an issue that captured Cold War hysteria during, and after, the war. In the chapter, "The Problems of Limited War," Hermes contributes a useful examination of the political effect on budgeting and manpower in the military. His strongest conclusion is that the U. S. fear of appearing as an aggressor necessitated a limited war policy. *Truce Tent* will appeal mostly to political and diplomatic historians but contains useful analysis for anyone studying the Korean War.

James Schnabel builds on Appleman's work in *Policy and Direction*, the third book in the series. This work details the major political events between the invasion of South Korea and General Matthew Ridgway's assumption of command of the U. S. Army's Far East Command. Schnabel argues that the Korean War is best understood within the context of Cold War politics between the Soviet Union and the United States. Their mutual distrust led both sides to establish proxy regimes in their respective parts of Korea. Although both removed occupation troops from Korea in 1949, the U. S. left an advisory group behind to train the ROK Army. Schnabel argues that even though the advisory group provided intelligence adequate to predict the North Korean invasion, it did not matter because U. S. policy left Korea outside of its zone of protection in the Pacific region. As a result, North Korea had little reason to believe the U. S. would intervene in their invasion, and MacArthur's Far East Command never developed contingency plans to do so.

The strength of Schnabel's work is that his narrative never bogs down in operational or tactical details and clearly depicts how battlefield events shaped policy. The work would be strengthened, however, by a section exploring the interaction of policy and public opinion and the implications of that relationship for a democracy at war. Instead, the book focuses on the relationship between the White House, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Far East Command. Fleshing out the influence of World War II on policy debates and its influence on the Korean War would widen the study's appeal, but this omission is due more to the time of its writing than any weakness of the author.

The fourth work in the series is *Ebb and Flow* by Billy C. Mossman. His narrative follows *South to Pusan*, and is set between November 1950 and July 1951. Mossman describes the progress and retreat of U. S. forces at great length and, naturally, focuses heavily on the U. S. reaction to Chinese intervention. He argues that continued manpower and equipment problems, the long retreat back to South Korea, and the skill of the Communist Chinese Forces (CCF) caused morale to sag in the U. S. Army. The Eighth Army's effectiveness on the battlefield did not improve until the spring of 1951 when General Matthew Ridgway took command following the accidental death of General Walton Walker.

Ridgway consolidated his forces south of Seoul and launched a series of limited counterattacks that gradually pushed the CCF back north of the 38th parallel, but memory of the previous winter tempered enthusiasm in the White House. The growing dispute between MacArthur and Truman over war policy further complicated matters. Mossman argues that MacArthur and his Congressional supporters wanted to attack CCF supply bases on the Chinese mainland, while Truman and his advisors, including the Joint Chiefs of Staff, continued to believe that Korea was a Soviet-coordinated distraction meant to drain American power and

leave Europe unprotected. MacArthur finally stepped beyond his bounds, and Truman relieved him of command. Truman promoted Ridgway to command the U. S. Army's Far East Command, which provided him with an ally on the battlefield.

The strength of *Ebb and Flow* lies in its inclusion of detailed information about the CCF, despite the difficulty in obtaining source documents. The study is a classic example of operational military history, and is useful to military planners and enthusiasts of the Korean War. The study does not engage enough in civil-military affairs to interest diplomatic or policy historians, however, and its failure to address any social issues associated with the war will likely turn general historians away.

A number of quality political-military histories of the Korean War have been less influential in the field, among them are Joseph Goulden's *Korea: The Untold Story of the War*, Richard Whelan's *Drawing the Line*, *The Korean War* by Max Hastings, *The Korean War: The West Confronts Communism* by Michael Hickey, and David Halberstam's *The Coldest Winter: America and the Korean War*. All of these works follow a general narrative pattern that begins with a short history of the partitioning of Korea, followed by the relationship between the White House and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Far East Command, and the Korean Military Advisory Group. These studies typically organize their narratives around four general phases of the war: the retreat to Pusan; the United Nations counter-offensive; the Chinese intervention; and the stalemate.

These studies diverge from each other in their points of emphasis. Hickey focuses on the United Nations and alliance building, particularly the British Commonwealth, while Hastings adds useful chapters on intelligence, the air war, and POWs. Goulden explains Chinese motivations for intervention, as opposed to Whelan, who explores broader diplomatic aspects of

the Cold War. A common weakness in this group of studies is the exclusion of broader social issues. Their synthesis of the political and military aspects of the war and avoidance of minute tactical details is their biggest strength. All of these books will appeal to general readers and provide useful secondary sources for historians of the Korean War.

The most useful of Korean War oral histories and personal memoirs are Donald Knox's *The Korean War: Pusan to Chosin* and *The Korean War: Uncertain Victory*. Both volumes organize their recollections chronologically, and include operational summaries for context. Discrepancies between individual memories and official histories are inherent in oral histories, and these volumes are no different. Nevertheless, they remain excellent sources for immersion into the confusion and emotion of the actual fighting. *The Coldest War*, by James Brady, is a useful memoir of the Marine Corps experience in Korea that emphasizes the effects of harsh weather and terrain on operations and morale. The inter-service rivalry between the Marine Corps and the Army, as well as their differing institutional mindsets, is on display in this memoir. Lewis H. Carlson's study, *Remembered Prisoners of a Forgotten War*, is an informative oral history that focuses on the horrendous conditions faced by American POWs. Psychologists argued that a majority POWs collaborated with the communists because of an innate weakness, and as a result, these men were looked down upon as failures and potential communist spies at home.

Korean War literature has grown to include social issues like race, the home-front, and gender in recent years, but the field still needs more attention. Historians Allen R. Millet and Kie-chiang Oh have argued that the ROK Army performed better than previously accepted, and that the original criticism stemmed from racial bias among American officers. Along the same lines, William T. Bowers, William M. Hammond, and George L. MacGarrigle re-examine the performance of black soldiers in *Black Soldier, White Army*, arguing that the lack of trust in the

all-black 24th Regiment created by the racial attitudes of white officers was mostly responsible for the Regiment's poor performance. Charles M. Bussey and Lyle Rishell have also argued the same point in separate works. Gender studies have received some attention, but focus mainly on the experience of nurses in the mobile army surgical hospitals.

Steven Casey's work, *Selling the Korean War*, is an outstanding examination of the interaction between war, propaganda, politics, and public opinion on the home front. Casey organizes his work chronologically with thematic subdivisions that focus on U. S. government efforts to sustain public support for the war. He argues that Truman relied on informal communication channels including speeches, official communiqués, and State and Defense Department Public Relations Bureaus, rather than establishing a formal propaganda agency. Casey challenges the idea that during the Korean War information was "an unregulated marketplace of ideas," arguing that the Truman administration purposefully used informal channels to influence opinion.⁸ Casey is quick to point out, though, that the purposeful use of information does not necessarily imply any sinister motives.

Another original work that is sure to influence future studies of the Korean War is Andrew J. Huebner's *The Warrior Image*. This study compares images of the American G. I. in World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. Huebner argues that official propaganda agencies and a willing press created an image of the World War II G. I. as an easy-going team player with a can-do attitude. By the end of the war, images had begun to portray more realism, but the war ended before this became a predominant trend. The press gained an opportunity to portray war realistically when Truman decided against creating a propaganda agency during the Korean War. The G. I. subsequently became a fatigued, stoic, and sorrowful victim of circumstance. The

⁸ Steven Casey, *Selling the Korean War: Propaganda, Politics, and Public Opinion in the United States, 1950-1953*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 13.

transformation of wartime imagery was gradual and continuities remained with World War II. Huebner asserts that the Korean War was a transition point between World War II, where the press was a tool of the government, and the Vietnam War, where open hostility existed between the press and the government.

The last major genre of Korean War literature focuses strictly on military operations in order to provide “lessons-learned.” These works targets military planners as their audience and include works on the air war, naval operations, and special operations. The Marine Corps has received attention in this genre in works on the Inchon landing and the Chosin Reservoir. S. L. A. Marshall’s *Pork Chop Hill* examines this prolonged battle at the tactical level, and the work provides a good study for use in an officer professional development program. Donald W. Boose Jr.’s *Over the Beach: U. S. Army Amphibious Operations in the Korean War* traces the Army’s history of amphibious warfare, and provides a series of concise operational studies focused on planning. Recent article-length works in this subfield are “The Ordeal of the Tiger Survivors,” by William C. Latham, Jr., and the series of articles focused on special operations published by the Office of the Command Historian for the Special Operations Command in *Veritas*.

If the historiography of the Korean War is sparse, then that of the Medal of Honor is virtually non-existent. The few books written about the MOH are typically set in the heroic mold with most of their attention focused on the official award citations. Examples of this type of study are Edward F. Murphy’s *Korean War Heroes*, Kenneth N. Jordan, Sr.’s *Forgotten Heroes*, Allen Mikaelian’s *Medal of Honor*, and Peter Collier’s *Medal of Honor: Portraits of Valor Beyond the Call of Duty*. Murphy organizes the awards chronologically within a broader narrative of the Korean War, while Jordan similarly organizes the citations while providing official communiqués from Far East Command for context. Mikaelian and Collier both present the award

in a longer timeframe with the citations in narrative form rather than strictly reproducing the official versions. Both use selected cases from each of America's major wars to define American heroism as distinctive and timeless, even as each war differed in various ways. The only book-length social history of the MOH is *The Exclusion of Black Soldiers from the Medal of Honor in World War II*, by Elliott V. Converse III, Daniel K. Gibran, John A. Cash, Robert K. Griffith, Jr., and Richard H. Kohn. This study examines the policies that dictated the nomination of, and approval for, the MOH, and argues that those policies allowed racial bias among officers to prevent black soldiers from earning the nation's highest decoration for bravery during World War II.

Much scholarly work remains undone on the Korean War. Political histories could further explore the long-term effects of the war on the relationship between the U. S. and both Koreas. The Korean War, more than World War II, directly influenced the creation of a U. S. military posture that endures today, and yet discussion of this fact remains limited to a few paragraphs of introductory material in most studies. The Korean War forced racial integration in the Army, but there is a lack of study on the effects of that change in both the Army and in broader society. The economic effects of the war and the experiences of families and veterans would also be valuable studies. New studies would help emphasize the war's importance to the Cold War and reverse its reputation as an aberration in American warfare.

Chapter 1

The Interwar Years: Korea, the Cold War, and the U. S. Army

The Korean peninsula became two distinct nations divided at the 38th parallel purely by historical chance. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt first discussed what to do with Korea after its liberation from Japan with Joseph Stalin at Yalta in 1945. The two men, unsurprisingly, had different opinions about what to do with Korea. Although both men agreed that a period of trusteeship was required since Korea had been under Japanese occupation for so long, they disagreed over the length of time it would take to turn control of the country over to the Koreans. Roosevelt envisioned a decades-long process of training and educating eventually resulting in a turnover of authority to civilian control, while Stalin favored a short period of occupation followed by elections. American planners recommended the 38th parallel as a dividing line because it divided the peninsula roughly in half. The Americans proposed that the Soviets accept Japanese surrender north of the line and the U. S., south. Stalin approved the plan, but American planners were nervous since their troops were too scattered to enforce the agreement militarily. As it turned out, Stalin stopped his forces at the 38th parallel because he already possessed everything he wanted from the Korean peninsula: industrial raw materials and warm-water ports. American troops occupied the south and both powers began a period of trusteeship in their respective portions of Korea.⁹

The Irony of Trusteeship

⁹ Joseph C. Goulden, *Korea: The Untold Story of the War* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982), 18-20; Richard Whelan, *Drawing the Line: The Korean War, 1950-1953* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1990), 24-34.

The greatest irony of the trusteeship period is that Koreans in the Soviet-controlled north actually enjoyed greater autonomy than their counterparts in the U. S.-controlled south. A political party consisting of members from the left and the right established an interim government, the Korean People's Republic (KPR), in both the north and the south following the Japanese surrender. Although the party included members from across the political spectrum, all agreed that Korea should be unified and independent. The KPR built its support by establishing local governments across the peninsula to provide police and essential services.¹⁰

The Soviets were much better than their American counterparts at co-opting local support, and they used the KPR to provide stability in the north. Michael Hickey points out that “the Russian 25th Army in the north had brought its own highly trained political staff,” and they “also possessed a high-powered public relations and propaganda machine.”¹¹ The Soviets empowered Korean political activists, even nationalists, at local levels to put a Korean face on government. Only those who embraced communism, however, could hold any real power at higher levels.

In contrast, the U. S. occupation was fairly inept. American officials initially conceived of the trusteeship of Korea as a four-power operation similar to the occupation of Germany. As late as September 1945, the British government had no idea that this was the U. S. plan. U. S. occupation forces under the command of Lieutenant General John R. Hodge had an inauspicious start. One of Hodge's primary failings, shared with many American troops, was his failure to understand basic cultural differences among Asians. His statement that Koreans were “the same breed of cats as the Japs,” undoubtedly encouraged racial chauvinism among the Americans.¹²

¹⁰ Whelan, 31-32.

¹¹ Michael Hickey, *The Korean War: The West Confronts Communism* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 1999), 11.

¹² *Ibid.*, 10.

Hodge viewed the KPR as a communist threat because of its success in the north, and he set out to destroy the organization in the south.¹³

Major General Archibald Arnold, second in command of U. S. forces in Korea, exacerbated the situation with his decision to retain Japanese civil servants. This decision antagonized the Koreans, and showed how unprepared senior American military officials were for the delicate and nuanced challenges of trusteeship. Hodge received an influx of American civil servants from Washington, but the language barrier and their cultural ignorance only increased tensions with the Koreans. He then turned to the Korean Democratic Party (KDP), a group of English speaking archconservatives, for support. Their influence further contributed to Hodge's view of the KPR as the source of all discontent with the American Military Government (AMG).¹⁴

Frustrated with the slow pace of progress and determined to prevent Korea from becoming a communist satellite, Hodge embraced political repression. Syngman Rhee wanted to become President of the Republic of Korea, and his virulent anti-communism earned him the support of President Truman. The U. S. hoped that Rhee would put a Korean face on their trusteeship and that he would build local support for U. S. policies. Rhee, however, was a nationalist, and he immediately criticized the Soviet Union and the United States for dividing the peninsula in the first place.¹⁵

By mid-1947, both the Americans and the Soviets wanted to hold nationwide elections in Korea, but could not agree on how to do it. The U. S. believed that communist subterfuge was rampant in the south and that communist agents would tamper with election results. In fact, it

¹³ Whelan, 35.

¹⁴ Ibid., 36-37.

¹⁵ Hastings, 33; Whelan, 39.

was AMG repression and its failure to attain stability that fed the popularity of left-wing political groups more so than any subterfuge. Above all, the AMG supported Rhee who brutally squashed resistance to his government. Between late 1948 and early 1949, the AMG stood by as Rhee's regime arrested 89,710 people. Worse still, Rhee's main political rival was assassinated in June 1949. The bitter truth was that most Koreans under U. S. trusteeship were less free than those on the Soviet side.¹⁶

KMAG and the U. S. Extrication from South Korea

Congressional Republicans prioritized rebuilding Europe over funding the AMG in Korea. Fear of Russian expansion and demobilizing the massive U. S. military force from World War II dominated political thinking during this time. A majority of Americans, including most military planners, relied on nuclear supremacy to provide relatively low-cost protection from Soviet expansion. This forced the military to prioritize its commitments, and Korea was at the bottom of the list.¹⁷

The Joint Chiefs of Staff argued that although Korea had "little strategic interest" for the United States, "a precipitate withdrawal of our forces under such circumstances would lower the military prestige of the United States, quite possibly to the extent of adversely affecting cooperation in other areas more vital to the security of the United States."¹⁸ This pronouncement indicated the importance of Europe to the U. S., and demonstrated the complexity of diplomatic maneuvering during the Cold War. The U. S. feared that showing weakness in Korea would

¹⁶ Hastings, 41-42; Whelan, 44-46; Goulden, 25-26.

¹⁷ Whelan, 43.

¹⁸ Ibid., 44.

encourage the Soviets to act aggressively in Europe, and believed the best solution to this problem was to turn the matter over to the United Nations. U. S. diplomats submitted a draft resolution on October 17, 1947, calling for “legislative elections throughout the Korean peninsula by March 31, 1948” under U. N. supervision.¹⁹ The U. S. and U. N. proceeded with elections in the south despite Russian objections, a de facto acknowledgement of the permanent division of the peninsula.²⁰

The Soviets sponsored their own elections in the north three months later, and claimed that 75 percent of voters in the south had participated.²¹ The claim was bogus, but it allowed them to say their government represented all Koreans. The election resulted in the formation of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea with Kim Il-Sung as its leader. By June 1949, the U. S. withdrew its occupation forces, leaving behind only the 500-man Korean Military Advisory Group (KMAG). The Soviets followed suit, leaving behind what historian Richard Whelan describes as “two hostile states – not really by American design, but by confusion, drift, misunderstanding, resentment, expedience, incompetence, good intentions, intransigence, failed bluffs, dashed hopes, and fear.”²²

Brigadier General W. Lynn Roberts, commander of the KMAG, officially assumed responsibility for military matters in Korea on July 1, 1949.²³ The KMAG, like the wider Army, faced serious problems. The ROK Army had spent most of Washington’s initial financial investment hunting opposition groups across South Korea. American planners had assumed

¹⁹ Ibid., 45.

²⁰ Hastings, 41.

²¹ Whelan, 47.

²² Ibid., 48.

²³ Blair, 45-46.

Rhee's government would take over defense costs as the Korean economy revived, but this proved impossible as the economy stalled. A few factories produced uniforms and small amounts of ammunition and equipment, but not nearly enough to fully outfit the ROK Army. The KMAG and the ROK Army were at the very end of the priority list for American budget planners, and a requested influx of American ammunition and equipment never materialized.²⁴

The officers of the KMAG instituted a typical American training plan for the ROK soldiers. When soldiers reached the desired level of proficiency at rifle marksmanship, first aid training, and map reading, among other skills, they moved on to team and squad tactics. Three major problems, besides the severe shortage of ammunition and equipment, prevented this plan from working. First, ROK enlisted soldiers were mostly illiterate and had no existing military jargon in their own language. This required KMAG and ROK soldiers to create their own terms for familiar items, a process that slowed the pace of training. Second, Korean culture prevented leaders from publicly admitting mistakes. This forced KMAG trainers to find new ways of developing leaders and increased the difficulties involved in training squads and platoons. Finally, the presence of the hostile NKPA across the 38th parallel forced the ROK Army to maintain four divisions on its border. The ROK government could not afford to bring them off the line for retraining.²⁵

KMAG officers pressed on, but the ROK Army remained woefully unprepared to defend its country from outside invasion. By early 1950, rifle qualification rates remained dismal, and only a few battalions were functioning proficiently. The four divisions on the 38th parallel were no better off. Lenient pass policies, lax discipline, and frequent rotations prevented any meaningful

²⁴ Blair, 51.

²⁵ Blair, 51-52; Hickey, 26-27.

improvement within the ROK Army. Despite these problems, U. S. officials reported to Washington that the ROK Army was performing at a high level of proficiency.²⁶

In early 1950, there were clear signs that the KMAG's days were numbered. The man scheduled to replace Roberts retired rather than go to Korea, and a spending bill intended to fund the KMAG was on hold in Congress. Truman announced that the U. S. would no longer support the Chinese Nationalist Chiang Kai-shek on Formosa, while Secretary of State Dean Acheson outlined a Pacific strategic defense plan that left Korea left out altogether.²⁷ Senator Tom Connally, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations and friend of the Truman administration, told a reporter that Korea was not "very greatly important" strategically to the U. S.²⁸ To observers both inside and outside of Korea, it appeared that the U. S. was indeed extricating itself from the peninsula.

Many analysts have condemned the KMAG as a complete failure, but it did enjoy some small but meaningful successes. The creation of specialty schools for logisticians, artillerymen, engineers, and other technical fields paid dividends for the ROK Army, and the Korean General Staff also started an officer school modeled on West Point that produced quality junior officers. The KMAG officers undoubtedly felt pressured to overemphasize these small successes so that Washington could politically justify extricating the U. S. from Korea. Roberts could not have been so blind as to believe that the small successes of the ROK Army could overcome its major

²⁶ Blair, 53-54.

²⁷ Blair, 55; Goulden, 29-30.

²⁸ Blair, 54.

problems, but he testified before Congress that the ROK Army was capable of defeating an invasion from the north.²⁹

The Effects of United States Foreign Policy on the Army

Following World War II, a majority of Americans wanted to “bring the boys home.” Clay Blair argues that this popular notion combined with “Truman’s trench-level military outlook” and “his fiscal conservatism and contempt for generals and admirals,” to weaken the U. S. military on many fronts.³⁰ In addition to drastic cuts in the Army, the Navy suffered a reduction of nearly 3 million men and 29 aircraft carriers. The Marine Corps nearly ceased to exist, while the Air Force maintained only 38 fighter groups, 11 of which were capable of conducting missions. The Truman administration reduced expenditures as it amplified the communist threat, but failed to prepare for conventional hot war contingencies.³¹

The U. S. viewed communism as a monolithic threat controlled by Moscow. In 1948, the communist blockade of Berlin and seizure of Czechoslovakia validated American fears of Soviet expansion. The 1949 communist take-over of China by Mao Zedong offered more evidence of a communist assault against the free world. The seminal event of that year, however, was the successful detonation of a nuclear weapon by the Soviet Union. Americans’ illusion of nuclear supremacy was shattered.³²

²⁹ Hickey, 28.

³⁰ Blair, 6.

³¹ Whelan, 173; Blair, 6-7, 9.

³² Whelan, 65-70.

The Soviet possession of the nuclear bomb shocked the Joint Chiefs of Staff, but the White House did not echo this concern. Clay Blair argues that “it was a moment in history for Harry Truman to stand tall: to proclaim a ‘different world’ strategically, to abandon his petty conviction that he was still being budgetarily flimflammed by the generals and admirals, and to pronounce a dramatic turnabout in his national security programs.”³³ Instead, however, he continued to reduce the defense budget. Truman publicly downplayed the significance of Soviet nuclear power, and privately pressured Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson to continue cutting costs.

The State and Defense Departments formed a joint study group, headed by Paul Nitze, to develop recommendations for a U. S. response to the events of 1948 and 1949. Republicans charged the Truman administration with being soft on communism, and Truman wanted a product from the group that would counter that claim. In response, Nitze’s team produced a policy paper known as National Security Council No. 68 (NSC-68). The document defined Soviet intentions as “the complete subversion or forcible destruction of the machinery of government and structure of society in the non-Soviet world, and their replacement by an apparatus and structure subservient to and controlled by the Kremlin.”³⁴ U. S. policy planners decided to remain on the strategic defensive, but acknowledged a massive defense buildup was required to contain Soviet expansion.

NSC-68 argued for a large standing military trained and equipped to respond to communist aggression, but Acheson knew the cost of building this force would be difficult to sell. The proposal outraged Johnson, who stormed out of a joint briefing between the State and Defense

³³ Blair, 20.

³⁴ Hastings, 50.

Departments. Truman, unaware of the total cost, scolded Johnson who promptly signed the proposal without any further distraction. Truman signed NSC-68 on April 25, 1950, but its implementation was delayed because of its cost.³⁵

Johnson submitted a proposed 1951 Defense budget of \$12.3 billion to Congress, a \$1.7 billion reduction from the previous year. The Joint Chiefs, fearing conflict with Truman and Johnson, supported the budget even though they knew it was far too small to implement the provisions of NSC-68. The Army cut another 47,000 troops, but Chief of Staff Joe Collins argued that the Army could better equip the fewer men.³⁶ Nothing was further from the truth in the U. S. Eighth Army, which was, at the time, performing occupation duties in Japan. In 1950, the Eighth Army consisted of four divisions: the 25th, 24th, 7th, and 1st Cavalry. Each division had wartime allocations of 18,800 men, but the 24th, 7th, and 1st Cavalry operated under budget-adjusted allocations of 12,500 men. The 25th Division had an allocation of 13,500 because it contained the overstaffed all-black 24th Regiment. Each division actually operated with fewer men than it had been allotted. Clay Blair estimates that “none of the four divisions was capable of laying down more than 62 percent of its normal infantry firepower.”³⁷ This setup may have worked for occupation duty, but it was woefully inadequate to fight a war.

In the five years between World War II and the Korean War, the Korean people transitioned from Japanese subjects to pawns in the proxy war between the Soviet Union and the U. S. Koreans were, ironically, more free in the communist north than in the democratic south because vehemently anti-communist President Rhee brutally repressed opposition to his regime. Faced

³⁵ Whelan, 72-74; Blair, 25-26.

³⁶ Whelan, 73; Blair, 27.

³⁷ Blair, 48.

with political pressure to end their mission in Korea, senior American officers inflated the capabilities of the ROK Army in their reports. Worse still, these officers happily deluded themselves about their own ability to protect U. S. interests around the world. The events of June 25, 1950 exposed the truth.

Chapter 2

Shock and Awe

The Cold War suddenly turned hot in the early morning hours of June 25, 1950, making the assessment of Soviet intentions contained in NSC-68 appear valid. State Department officials used the invasion to sell a military buildup to the American public. Truman believed, along with most Americans, that the Soviet Union was behind the invasion; its true purpose to distract the United States in Asia while expanding communism in Eastern Europe and the Middle East. Initially, Truman enjoyed broad support for his decision to intervene, but that support quickly eroded as the inherent difficulties of waging a limited war became apparent. From the start, Truman found it difficult to sell limited objectives in Korea to Congress and the public. A majority of Americans supported the stand against communist aggression, but they were far from certain if Korea was the right place to do so. Cold War fears amplified this conflict, creating an atmosphere that contrasted starkly with recent memories of national unity during World War II. America sent its ill-trained, ill-equipped, and undermanned Army into the fray, and the results enflamed an already tense situation in Washington.

The Decision to Intervene and Task Force Smith

American policy planners viewed the North Korean invasion of South Korea as both proof of Soviet war mongering and as an opportunity to justify the cost of NSC-68. Fearing public overreaction, Truman downplayed the severity of the situation. During a press conference, he agreed with a reporter's suggestion that the U. S. had committed itself to a U. N. "police action," a statement that haunted him for the duration of the war.³⁸ It was a fine line however, because the

³⁸ Blair, 80; Goulden, 86.

threat had to be serious enough to maintain public support. Truman announced U.S. intervention on June 27, and linked the communist invasion to a potential Chinese threat to Formosa. He intended this connection to reinforce the idea that all communists acted in unison, and the move garnered support for intervention from Republicans as a stand against the broader communist threat.³⁹

Five days after the invasion began, the President authorized the U. S. Air Force “to conduct missions on specific military targets in Northern Korea wherever militarily necessary,” the Navy to blockade the Korean coast, and General MacArthur “to use certain supporting ground units” to meet the United Nation’s request for aid.⁴⁰ Truman committed U. S. troops to the fighting, but endorsed limited objectives, and believed he “must avoid a general Asiatic war.”⁴¹ To build bipartisan support for intervention, the President emphasized the potential loss of credibility by the U. S. if it abandoned South Korea to its fate. It was only a matter of days, however, before political fissures opened, and bad news from the battlefield further complicated matters.⁴²

Lieutenant Colonel Charles “Brad” Smith, commander of 1st Battalion, 21st Regiment, received a phone call from his regimental commander, Colonel Richard Stephens, on the evening of June 30. Stephens told Smith, “The lid has blown off – get on your clothes and report to the CP [command post].”⁴³ Stephens informed Smith that his men would be the first American

³⁹ Bevin Alexander, *Korea: The First War We Lost* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1986), 36-40.

⁴⁰ Press Release, June 30, 1950, Harry S. Truman Administration File, Elsey Papers, Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, MO, http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/koreanwar/index.php (accessed September 13, 2010).

⁴¹ Handwritten Note by Harry S. Truman, June 30, 1950, President’s Secretary’s Files, Truman Papers, Truman Library, (accessed September 14, 2010).

⁴² Hastings, 57, 61-62; Goulden, 85.

⁴³ Appleman, *South to Pusan*, 60.

troops to fight in Korea. His force was small, consisting of two under-strength companies, ten 75 mm recoilless rifles, and eight mortar tubes. Of his 440 men, only about 75 had combat experience from World War II, but the confident young soldiers believed the North Koreans would turn and run when they saw Americans on the battlefield.⁴⁴

Smith's battalion was part of General William F. Dean's 24th Division. Dean arrived in Taejon as Smith moved his men north toward Osan and the 1st and 3rd Battalions of the 34th Regiment arrived in Pusan. Dean planned to position Task Force Smith between Osan and Pyongtaek to block the North Korean southward thrust along the main Seoul-to-Pusan corridor. He ordered the two battalions of the 34th Regiment to establish defensive positions near Pyongtaek. Additional forces would reinforce the defensive line as they arrived in country.⁴⁵

Task Force Smith arrived at its position at 3 o'clock a.m. on July 5. Lieutenant Philip Day remembered a cold drizzle that quickly turned hillside positions into mud, remarking that "everyone was tired, wet, cold, and a little bit pissed off."⁴⁶ Smith positioned his infantry on several hilltops straddling the main road connecting Suwon and Osan. His recoilless rifles supported the infantry from the east and west, while mortars provided indirect fire support from the south. Smith placed his artillery support, from the 52d Field Artillery, about a mile to the southwest of his forward positions.⁴⁷

The first column of eight North Korean T-34 tanks rumbled into view at daybreak. Day's platoon scrambled into position and fired their 75mm recoilless rifles, but direct hits glanced off

⁴⁴ Alexander, 55; Goulden, 110; Whelan, 174.

⁴⁵ Blair, 96-97.

⁴⁶ Donald Knox, *The Korean War: Pusan to Chosin: An Oral History* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1985), 19.

⁴⁷ Appleman, *South to Pusan*, 66-67.

the armored beasts. Mortar shells and small arms fire, like the bazooka rounds, also proved ineffective.⁴⁸ This small group of Americans squared off against thirty-three tanks and an entire infantry division.⁴⁹ The tanks rumbled through the American forward defense virtually untouched, then proceeded toward the artillery positions. The artillery commander, Lieutenant Colonel Miller O. Perry, repositioned his gun tubes to fire directly at the tanks. The 105mm howitzer rounds failed to destroy the tanks, but they immobilized several of them. The first American killed in the Korean War died from a gunshot wound suffered during an engagement with a NKPA tank crew escaping from a damaged T-34.⁵⁰ This was a major engagement from the American perspective, but the NKPA viewed it as a minor speed bump, hardly a reason to halt their advance. While the young American soldiers stood dumbfounded, the tanks rolled south towards Osan.

Armored formations work best as the spearhead of an attack. Their speed and protection produce a shock effect on opposing ground troops and open infiltration lanes for infantry to exploit. Colonel Smith understood that his men had only faced the beginning of a much larger attack. He ordered his men to dig in deeper before the infantry assault came. Approximately an hour after the last tank passed through his lines, Smith observed three more tanks, numerous trucks, and NKPA infantry troops. Smith engaged five thousand enemy troops with a force one-tenth of that size.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Knox, *Pusan to Chosin*, 21-22.

⁴⁹ Blair, 101.

⁵⁰ Fehrenbach, 68.

⁵¹ Appleman, *South to Pusan*, 72; Alexander, 60-61; Goulden, 122.

From nearly one thousand yards away, Task Force Smith unleashed what hell it could. Smith initially achieved surprise because the first waves of T-34s failed to alert the ground forces behind them to the American presence. The NKPA recovered quickly, however, and moved to surround Smith's men. Smith ordered a sequential retreat to maintain covering fire for each platoon as they moved, but untrained in this maneuver, his men panicked and fled.⁵² Day recalled that "Guys fell around me. Mortar rounds hit here and there. One of my young guys got it in the middle. My platoon sergeant, Harvey Vann, ran over to him ... 'No way he's gonna live, Lieutenant.' Oh, Jesus, the guy was moaning and groaning. There wasn't much I could do. . . ."⁵³ Smith organized his remaining men, and they fought out of the encirclement leaving dying men behind. Nearly 150 of Smith's 440 men had been killed, captured, or were missing by the end of the day.⁵⁴

The 34th Regiment dug positions south of Smith, near Pyongtaek, while Task Force Smith engaged the first group of tanks. The 1st Battalion situated itself about two miles north of Pyongtaek, along the same north-south road as Task Force Smith, while the 3rd Battalion went to Ansong, twelve miles east of Pyongtaek. The remnants of Task Force Smith straggled into their lines after midnight.⁵⁵

The Trial of the 34th Regiment

⁵² Alexander, 60; Goulden, 122.

⁵³ Knox, *Pusan to Chosin*, 23.

⁵⁴ Goulden, 123; Alexander, 62.

⁵⁵ Alexander, 63.

The piecemeal commitment of U. S. forces left the chain of command in a confused state. Normally, Lieutenant Colonel Harold B. Ayres, commander of 1st Battalion, 34th Regiment, received orders from his regimental commander, Colonel Jay B. Lovless. General George B. Barth, temporarily commanding the 24th Division Artillery, was on the ground with Ayres though, and Barth ordered Ayres to hold his position as long as possible but “not to end up like Brad Smith.”⁵⁶ That night Ayres relayed the orders Barth had given him to Lovless who, in turn, revised his regimental plan. His revised plan did not require 3rd Battalion, and he ordered them to move south to Chonan.

At daybreak on July 6, the NKPA opened fire on Ayres’ men. The 1st Battalion barely returned fire, and according to historian Bevin Alexander, “later examination of thirty-one weapons in one platoon showed that twelve of the rifles were broken or dirty or had been assembled incorrectly, an astonishing commentary on the state of training of the individual riflemen.”⁵⁷ Within an hour, Ayres, mindful of Barth’s instructions, ordered a retreat to Chonan that quickly turned into a debacle. His men threw away vital equipment as they fled, including helmets, rifles, and ammunition. Even more striking, soldiers from the 3rd Battalion, who had not been under fire, did the same thing on their movement to Chonan.⁵⁸

When Ayres reached Chonan, he found an angry Barth who accused him of failing to delay the NKPA as ordered. General Dean was furious. He drove to the 34th Regiment’s command post where he held a terse meeting with Barth, Lovless, Ayres, and the 3rd Battalion commander, David Smith. Dean demanded to know who ordered the retreat because it threw off his overall

⁵⁶ Goulden, 124.

⁵⁷ Alexander, 64.

⁵⁸ Blair, 106-07.

scheme. In a classic example of general officer amnesia, Barth remained silent. Ayres realized that Barth was covering for himself, and took responsibility for ordering his battalion to withdraw. Dean read the truth of the situation and ordered Barth to return to Taejon. He relieved Colonel Lovless of command and replaced him with Colonel Robert R. Martin, then ordered Martin to attack north the next morning. Dean hoped to get his original plan back on track under the leadership of a commander he trusted.⁵⁹

The 3rd Battalion established a defensive position again, but things continued to go badly for them. Major John J. Dunn, the regimental operations officer, went to the battalion's forward lines to relieve David Smith of command. He found the battalion withdrawing without having made contact with the NKPA. No one could find Smith or his second in command, so Dunn immediately assumed command of the battalion and again moved them north. Dunn's lead party consisted of the 3rd Battalion's operations officer, Major Boone Seegars, two company commanders, a security element, and himself. Their two jeeps drove into an ambush that wounded both majors. The battalion's lead rifle company moved to within assault distance, but rather than attack they hunkered down in covered positions. A few moments later someone ordered a retreat, and no one even attempted to rescue the wounded men. Major Dunn was a prisoner of war for the next 38 months, while Seegars died of his wounds.⁶⁰

Colonel Martin rushed north to stop the ensuing retreat of the 3rd Battalion. He believed the disarray resulted from lack of training, unit cohesion, and strong leadership, and Martin decided the best way to steady his men was to lead by example. He ordered the battalion to dig in around Chonan on the night of July 7. The next morning several NKPA T-34s came into view ahead of

⁵⁹ Blair, 107-08.

⁶⁰ Blair, 109-10; Alexander, 66-67.

its infantry, and, determined to inspire his men, Martin fired a bazooka at one of them. The tank responded with an 85mm main-gun round that cut his body in half. Two-thirds of the battalion was killed or captured in the ensuing chaos.⁶¹

General Dean's Last Stand

While the 21st and 34th Regiments were breaking apart Dean's 19th Regiment, the "Rock of Chickamauga," assembled in Pusan and then moved north. On July 14, the 19th Regiment positioned itself on the western flank of the remnants of the 34th Regiment near the Kum River. That same day, the NKPA rendered the 34th combat ineffective, which left the 19th's flank exposed. The 19th had three companies abreast on an east-west axis in the vicinity of Taepyong-ni, with artillery support to the south and two under-strength companies on its far eastern and western flanks. Dean tasked Colonel Guy S. Meloy, Jr., the regimental commander, with delaying the NKPA at the Kum River, but just like the shattered regiments before him, his was green, undertrained, and unsupported.⁶²

The NKPA launched multiple probing attacks throughout the afternoon of July 15. These small reconnaissance patrols sought weak points in the American line, and at three o'clock a.m. the NKPA launched a diversionary attack on the American eastern flank. Its main battle force exploited a large gap on the American western flank that poised the North Koreans to capture the 19th's headquarters. The Regimental staff officers counterattacked with a force that included cooks and desk clerks, but quickly dissolved after the officers in charge were killed. Dean ordered the 19th to withdraw, but the loss of communication lines prevented everyone from

⁶¹ Blair, 110; Alexander, 67.

⁶² Alexander, 83-84.

getting the order. The Americans fought their way out in small groups and straggled into Taejon in the early morning hours of July 17.⁶³

General Walton Walker, the Eighth Army commander and Dean's immediate superior, met with Dean in Taejon on July 18. Walker informed Dean that the 1st Cavalry Division was arriving in Korea and that it would take two days to get them into position at the front. Dean consolidated his damaged regiments to defend Taejon, hoping they could hold the line for two days. The situation was so dire that as replacements arrived, they were immediately shipped to Taejon.⁶⁴ Sergeant Robert Dews remembered his experience as a replacement:

We were put on a Japanese fishing boat that smelled to high heaven of dead fish. When we arrived in Pusan, everyone was quite sick. Still smelling of fish, we were immediately sent north. The road south was clogged with refugees, walking wounded, and trucks carrying the dead and severely wounded. Everything in Taejon was in turmoil. We replacements were picked up like stray cattle by hungry units looking for bodies.⁶⁵

This system further undermined the trust and cohesion that successful combat units require. This situation drove many officers, even senior ones like Colonel Robert Martin, to assume the job of a rifleman in order to inspire their men. During the defense of Taejon, Dean found himself in the same position.

Dean relocated his headquarters and most of the 19th Regiment from Taejon to Yongdong to re-equip and gather replacements. That left him with the remnants of the 21st and 34th Regiments, each of which fielded about a battalion-sized force, and an under-strength battalion of the 19th as a tactical reserve. The only good news Dean learned was that his men were finally equipped with new 3.5-inch rocket launchers that could penetrate T-34 armor. Dean divided his

⁶³ Alexander, 86-91.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 92-93.

⁶⁵ Knox, *Pusan to Chosin*, 50.

infantry to block the Kapchon River passages into Taejon, guard the artillery, and defend the city itself. The NKPA attacked this tiny force with two full infantry divisions.⁶⁶

The North Koreans began by dropping propaganda leaflets in an air raid, and followed with an infantry attack from the north and west. Earlier, Dean had pulled a platoon in closer to the city, and the NKPA exploited the resulting gap to pressure the Americans from the west, north, and south. The fighting subsided at nightfall, but the North Koreans quietly infiltrated their infantry through gaps in the American line.⁶⁷

NKPA tanks punched through the thin lines of the 34th northwest of the city at three o'clock a.m. The regiment cracked under pressure, which allowed NKPA infantry, riding on tanks, to set up sniper positions inside of Taejon. The bulk of their forces, however, remained outside the city. T-34 tanks roamed Taejon throughout the morning, but the Americans, led by Dean himself, destroyed five of them using their new bazookas. Nevertheless, the NKPA cut Dean's communication lines, which severely hampered his ability to coordinate units. Leaders of the 34th and 19th Regiments retreated south in the confusion, leaving just one platoon as the only U. S. force west of Taejon.⁶⁸

The North Koreans squeezed the city from three directions, and Dean ordered his remaining forces to withdraw. The NKPA destroyed the first two vehicles in his convoy as it attempted to get out of the city. The remaining vehicles continued on, but aimlessly drove around the city drawing sniper fire everywhere they went. General Dean's driver made a wrong turn that separated his and several other vehicles from the main convoy. Dean stopped at a wrecked

⁶⁶ Alexander, 93-94.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 96-97.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 97-102.

vehicle on the road nearly a mile south of the city to loaded wounded men into his jeep. Further down the road Dean recognized a second roadblock as an ambush, and ordered his men to covered positions. They moved to the base of a mountain at nightfall, planning to continue east to Yongdong on foot. During the night, Dean fell and was knocked unconscious as he looked for water for his wounded men. He awoke alone with a broken shoulder. Dean evaded the North Koreans for thirty-six days before his capture, making him the highest ranking American POW of the war.⁶⁹

The battle of Taejon was a complete disaster for the U. S. Army, and on July 22 the 24th Division turned over responsibility for the front lines to the 1st Cavalry. In the first three weeks of war the 24th retreated over a hundred miles, often in panic. Soldiers had discarded their weapons and equipment, and left wounded men behind. Nearly 4,000 men were killed, wounded or captured, among them the division commander, a regimental commander, and numerous field grade officers. The official Army history of this phase of the war argues that heroism was displayed on the battlefield, but only because it was necessary to overcome numerous and unforgivable challenges arising from the pitiful state of readiness of the Army.⁷⁰

The men on the battlefield never doubted the seriousness of their situation. Reporters accompanying the shocked and demoralized American troops were just as outraged by the poor state of the Army. General MacArthur's Far East Command claimed that the retreats were by design, but without a propaganda agency to direct the media, correspondents were able to realistically portray the human costs of the war. MacArthur's headquarters criticized the press for

⁶⁹ Ibid., 104-06.

⁷⁰ Alexander, 107; Appleman, *South to Pusan*, 180-81.

doing so, but the reports and images from the early months of the war established a negative perception of the Korean War that persists today.

Chapter 3

The Media: Between Accessory & Antagonist

During World War I, President Woodrow Wilson created the Committee on Public Information (CPI), a formal government propaganda agency. The CPI used stereotypes to stir hatred towards German and public support for the war, but as early as the 1920s the organization was viewed by many Americans as having gone too far. During World War II, President Franklin D. Roosevelt created the Office of War Information (OWI) to build and sustain public support. Mindful of the CPI experience, the OWI focused on promoting ideals such as Roosevelt's Four Freedoms. As the war went on, Roosevelt clashed with the OWI because he thought it should focus on selling war bonds, while high profile members of the OWI like Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. insisted that its focus should remain on promoting ideals. The OWI also clashed with the Office of Censorship (OOC), but the organizations eventually worked out a solution whereby the OWI offered journalists suggestions for what they should say, while the OOC told journalists what they could not say. These agencies had a near monopoly on information management and heavily influenced the portrayal of American G. I.s. Towards the end of World War II, however, images and war reports became more realistic. President Truman did not create similar agencies during the Korean War because he viewed the CPI and OWI as necessities of total war. Instead, the Truman administration used existing information channels to build public support for the war. The uncoordinated information management system resulted in confusion, while the absence of censorship allowed the press to move away from being a mouthpiece, as it had been in World War II, and towards what would eventually become open antagonism in Vietnam.⁷¹

⁷¹ Huebner, 19-20; Casey, 6, 87-88.

Truman's Information System

President Truman's refusal to establish a formal propaganda agency forced his administration to sell the war through "informal channels."⁷² Truman himself was the most authoritative source for information. His public addresses carried the weight of policy, but Truman was "often ill at ease when reading a prepared set piece speech."⁷³ In addition, the President remained relatively quiet during the early days of the war, creating an information gap that his Congressional enemies seized upon.

The Defense Department's Office of Public Information (OPI) and the State Department's Office of Public Affairs (OPA) were important information sources outside of the White House. The press bombarded the OPI with information requests at the outset of the war, but the agency was ineffective due to personnel shortages. The OPA was more effective at answering questions, but was limited to publicizing policy information and knew little about what was happening on the battlefield. The most influential source for war information, outside the White House, was General MacArthur's headquarters in Tokyo. MacArthur refused formal censorship, a decision that caused consternation among reporters and senior defense officials alike. Army public information officers suffered from a lack of guidelines, leading to overly generic briefings, and reporters complained that the briefings did not provide them with enough useful information. Reporters soon complained about the sharp contrast between MacArthur's communiqués and

⁷² Casey, 6.

⁷³ Ibid.

reports from correspondents in Korea. These loosely linked, problematic channels constituted the Truman administration's information system during the Korean War.⁷⁴

The popular view of communism as a spreading disease contributed to "the almost universal applause that greeted Truman's decision to intervene in Korea."⁷⁵ Opinion polls reflected overwhelming public support, and the White House claimed that only two major newspapers dissented. A *Washington Post* editorial said that "these are days calling for steady nerves, for a strict eye on the ball, and for a renewed resolve to keep our purposes pure in the grapple we have undertaken with men who would plunge the world into darkness. The occasion has found the man in Harry Truman."⁷⁶ Truman biographer David McCullough lists over a dozen influential Americans who publicly supported the decision to intervene in Korea. Voicing their support, the House of Representatives approved extending the draft by a vote of 315 to 4, and influential Senate Republican William Knowland publicly urged support for the President. Journalist Joseph Harsch said, "never before ... have I felt such a sense of relief and unity pass through the city," in twenty years of working in Washington.⁷⁷

This support, however, quickly evaporated for two reasons. First, the decision to limit the fighting in Korea bred dissent; second, news of the 24th's rapid disintegration disillusioned the public and legitimated criticism of the limited commitment. MacArthur's policy of press self-censorship and the uncoordinated information system within the White House and the Army opened the door to realistic wartime reporting that fed political criticism and public dissent.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Ibid., 6-9.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 35.

⁷⁶ David McCullough, *Truman* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 781.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 781-82.

⁷⁸ Casey, 20-34, 36-37, 44-49; Huebner, 36-37.

Given the performance of the 24th Division during the first weeks of the war, news was understandably bad. War correspondent Marguerite Higgins claimed there was already a pervading sense of panic when she arrived in Seoul at the end of June. Constant retreat over the next three weeks did nothing to change that, and reporters accurately described what they saw. Some senior officers in MacArthur's headquarters believed reporters were not adequately censoring their dispatches, but Higgins says, "We felt it our responsibility to report the disasters as we saw them. And we knew how passionately the guys who were doing the fighting wanted the 'folks back home' to know what they were up against."⁷⁹ The source of this conflict lay in differing points of view. MacArthur viewed events from the strategic level, which, under the circumstances, necessitated a series of costly delaying actions, while reporters at the front witnessed the human cost of lifeless paper plans.⁸⁰

Historian Andrew J. Huebner argues that "within the looser bounds of government censorship journalists laid bare the gloom of this early period."⁸¹ Higgins reported that comments like "Just give me a jeep and I know which direction I'll go in. This mamma's boy ain't cut out to be no hero," were common among the men.⁸² Lieutenant Edward James barely contained his fury when he challenged Higgins: "Are you correspondents telling the people back home the truth? Are you telling them that out of one platoon of twenty men, we have three left? Are you telling them that we have nothing to fight with, and that it is an utterly useless war?"⁸³ These statements sharply

⁷⁹ Marguerite Higgins, *War in Korea: The Report of a Woman Combat Correspondent* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1951), 41-43, 95.

⁸⁰ Casey, 48-49.

⁸¹ Huebner, 101.

⁸² Higgins, 84.

⁸³ Ibid.

contrasted those of senior officers. Correspondent Denis Warner reported that prior to the disaster at Pyongtaek, General Barth stated, “Those Commie bastards will turn and run when they find they’re up against our boys.”⁸⁴ Barth was wrong.

Imagery from the Korean War reflected the changing tone of print news. Huebner argues that imagery of the American G. I. in Korea emphasized fatigue, sorrow, and stoicism, but acknowledges that this reflected a gradual process rather than a sudden change.⁸⁵ Soldiers’ poor physical condition, resulting from soft duty in Japan, exaggerated the tremendous physical exertion required to fight in the harsh terrain and weather of Korea. As a result, soldiers often looked exhausted, and photographs typically portrayed sleeping soldiers. A July *Newsweek* article reported that soldiers were “dog tired,” and “slogging” through retreat, while *Life* printed a photo captioned “exhausted and unshaven American infantrymen [a]sleep on ration boxes and [a] rocky road-side.”⁸⁶ Newsreel footage usually included images of sleeping soldiers, reinforcing the exhaustion motif. This theme featured prominently in the first Hollywood movies set in Korea as well.

Images of Korean refugees brought the sorrowful reality of war home to the U. S. in a way not experienced in World War II, while many soldiers had the emotionally wrenching experience of leaving wounded men behind. These images and experiences led major media outlets to refer to Korea as “Hell Country” or “the Ugly War,” and radio broadcasts even ran uncensored and emotional comments from soldiers in the war zone.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ David Halberstam, *The Coldest Winter: America and the Korean War* (New York: Hyperion, 2007), 147.

⁸⁵ Huebner, 101-03.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 102-03.

Huebner asserts that the last characteristic of Korean War imagery is stoicism. He argues that journalists continued to portray American soldiers as heroic, but the heroic image differed from World War II. G. I.s fought on behalf of those on the home front in World War II, but they did not connect in the same way during the Korean War because of its limited scope. The Korean War image of the G. I. “reflected the bleak odds facing American troops and reinforced the sense that they were somehow victims of circumstance.”⁸⁸ These images portrayed a stoic warrior who faced impossible odds for a limited cause that his own Commander in Chief labeled a police-action.

The new image of the G. I. as a victim contributed to negative perceptions of the war in the public mind. Enthusiasm for the war increased after the successful U. S. landing at Inchon and subsequent invasion of North Korea, but the Chinese intervention in late November caused a sudden, drastic reversal of fortune. Beginning in January 1951, the White House and the Army made a concerted effort to improve their relationship with the press, which they hoped would alter the tone of reporting. That effort included publicizing the Medal of Honor. Truman had already displayed his willingness to influence opinion with the MOH when he used the opportunity of the successful Inchon invasion to announce its award to General Dean.

General Dean Awarded the Medal of Honor

American lines firmed up around Pusan during the first two weeks of August, 1950. The remainder of the Eighth Army moved into the South Korean port and its commander, General Walton Walker, coordinated the fight. Increased numbers of soldiers from both the U. S. and U. N. stabilized the lines. In addition, the NKPA overextended its supply lines. The combination

⁸⁸ Ibid., 103.

of these factors stalled the North Korean advance. This small victory bolstered American confidence, but MacArthur's masterstroke at Inchon turned the tide of the war.

MacArthur conceived the idea for the Inchon landing in the first days of the war. On July 23, he described his plan to launch an "amphibious landing of a two division corps in rear of enemy lines for purpose of enveloping and destroying enemy forces in conjunction with attack from south by Eighth Army" to the JCS.⁸⁹ The Joint Chiefs were uncertain about the operation, but MacArthur prevailed upon them largely because of his reputation and overpowering personality. The landing was one of the most successful operations in the history of warfare and a moment of vindication for the Marine Corps, which had nearly ceased to exist in the interwar years. The operation broke the NKPA. Syngman Rhee restored his government in Seoul with an emotional ceremony on September 29, and with emotions running high from the rejuvenating effects of victory Truman announced that Major General William F. Dean was the first American to receive the Medal of Honor in the Korean War.

President Truman, like the vast majority of Americans, was awed by the MOH. It simultaneously rewarded individual heroism, celebrated patriotism, and altered memory. In 1945 Truman said of awarding the MOH to Jake Lindsay, "it was a privilege on my part to put this medal around his neck and I would rather have that medal than to be President of the U. S."⁹⁰ Truman respected the award, but he also understood that its emotional appeal could be used for specific ends. In a draft speech he used the MOH to vilify Congressional Republicans for politicizing legislation during the 1946 mid-term elections. Truman wrote in part:

It has been my privilege as President to bestow the Congressional Medal of Honor upon more than a hundred men who have won it.

⁸⁹ MacArthur, 346.

⁹⁰ Robert H. Ferrell, ed., *Off the Record: The Private Papers of Harry S. Truman* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), 34.

I placed it around the neck of General Wainwright in the Rose Garden of the White House. The General shed tears and told me that he expected to come home a disgraced man because he'd had to surrender to a vastly superior force on Bataan. I was happy to assure him that the American people considered him a man, a leader and a hero.

I placed the medal around the neck of a good looking young man in a wheeled chair – with both legs torn off in action. I myself felt like shedding tears when I fastened the medal. I told him that the country was grateful to him for his sacrifice. He replied, “Mr. President, my life is my country’s and my country may still have it.”

I placed this same greatest of medals – one I’d rather earn than be President – around the neck of a young sailor – a conscientious objector – who had served in the naval hospital corps and who had carried a number of men who were previously wounded to safety under fire and was one of the bravest of men – and he was honest. He told me that he loved his country and would serve it anywhere – but he would not kill a fellow man.

Why do I tell you these things? Because you have forgotten them. You have forgotten the ideals for which we fought under Franklin Roosevelt. Your vision is dimmed by greed, by selfishness, by a thirst for power. You would sacrifice the greatest government that was ever conceived in the mind of man for a mess of pottage – for a piece of beef, for a slice of bacon.⁹¹

Truman never delivered this speech, but it demonstrates his belief in the power of the MOH to affect the public. Truman undoubtedly had this in mind when he announced Dean’s award on September 30, 1950.

On that day the Associated Press (AP) reported from Washington that Truman “paid tribute to Gen. Dean’s heroic leadership, courageous and loyal devotion to his men, and his complete disregard for personal safety.”⁹² Truman, in a separate statement, said that he had “profound respect and admiration for Dean and the other American fighting men who endured the early, heartbreaking retreats that turned at last into victory.”⁹³ Truman’s language in this statement is important. The President recast the early *heartbreaking* days of the war as just one step in a long process that ultimately led to *victory*. Truman intended his statement to counteract negative reports that had left such a bad taste in the public’s mouth.

⁹¹ Ibid., 101-02.

⁹² “Truman Awards Medal of Honor to Maj. Gen. Dean,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 1, 1950.

⁹³ Ibid.

The AP quoted other portions of the official award citation emphasizing phrases like “Conspicuous Gallantry” and “Inspiring Acts,” and provided lengthy quotes that elucidated Dean’s positive actions during the Taejon battle. The article’s construction demonstrates the purposeful use of language to influence memory as it connects Dean’s past actions to the eventual outcome at Inchon. Truman said, “These acts, so inspiring to those of us here on the home front, were of almost incalculable value on the battlefield. They substantially contributed to the surge of heroism and devotion which swept thru the ranks of the embattled infantry men of those early days in Korea and enabled them to make their magnificent stand against the overwhelming forces opposing them.”⁹⁴ As a two-war President, Truman understood better than anyone else that Americans flushed with victory would all too easily accept this new memory of the past. Dean’s case thus serves as a preeminent example of how the MOH connected the battlefield to the home front, and altered memory through its widely accepted symbolism.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

Chapter 4

The Modern American Military Award System

George Washington created the first medal for American soldiers during the Revolutionary War. The Badge of Military Merit was striking because it broke with the European tradition of bestowing awards only upon officers, but it was awarded sparsely and fell into disuse immediately after the Revolution. The American military did not maintain any award until 1847, when the Army established the Certificate of Merit for acts of heroism against an enemy. The Army discontinued the Certificate of Merit after the Mexican-American War but reinstated it in 1874.

The Medal of Honor, created in 1861, was the first permanent award in the American military. At that time, the MOH held little meaning because it was widely distributed. The process of sanctifying the MOH began at the turn of the 20th century. The Army converted the Certificate of Merit to the Distinguished Service Cross in 1918, and with the addition of the Silver Star and the Distinguished Service Medal in 1919, established the American Pyramid of Honor. The awards pyramid expanded during World War II to cover a greater number of soldiers, including pilots and service soldiers among others. Since that time, the essential structure established in World War I, and expanded in World War II to recognize both heroism and service, has remained intact. The MOH achieved its hallowed status over time through the creation of lower awards and the implementation of a bureaucratic structure to maintain the paucity of its award. The most important factor, however, was the high percentage of posthumous MOHs in World War II.

19th Century U. S. Decorations and Medals

Secretary of the Navy Gideon Wells recommended creation of the MOH as a way to promote efficiency within the Navy, and soon after the Army created its own MOH. Both branches identified acts of gallantry, or displays of soldier-like qualities, as the main criteria for the award. This vague language resulted in a wide range of nominative interpretation. With no bureaucratic experience handling awards, the Army and Navy awarded the MOH for a variety of acts.⁹⁵

The first award of the MOH involved a group of twenty-one Union soldiers, and a spy named James J. Andrews, that left Shelbyville, Tennessee in April 1862 to capture a Confederate locomotive near Atlanta. They planned to sabotage lines of communication on their way north to Chattanooga to prevent Confederate reinforcements from arriving when the Union launched an impending attack. The mission failed, and the Confederates captured all twenty-two men. The Confederates executed eight of the men, while another eight escaped. The remaining six were prisoners of war until March 1863. Upon their release the prisoners were ordered to debrief the Judge Advocate General in Washington, D. C. Secretary of War Edwin Stanton received the men, praised their bravery, and informed them that they were to be the first recipients of a new medal authorized by Congress. Nineteen-year-old Jacob Parrott, a member of the raiding party, became the first man awarded the MOH.⁹⁶

At the end of the Civil War, 1,520 Medals of Honor had been awarded, not all of them for acts of gallantry. Edwin Stanton authorized the commander of the 27th Maine to award the MOH to any of his men who extended their commitment beyond their scheduled discharge. All of the unit's men, regardless of whether or not they stayed, received the MOH due to a clerical error.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Allen Mikaelian, *Medal of Honor: Profiles of America's Military Heroes From the Civil War to the Present* (New York: Hyperion, 2002), xviii.

⁹⁶ Edward F. Murphy, *Korean War Heroes* (Novato, CA: Presidio, 1992), 2-3; Mikaelian, xvii.

⁹⁷ Murphy, 3; Mikaelian, xix.

Controversy erupted over awarding the MOH to civilian doctor Mary Walker who claimed to be a spy for the Union Army, but Judge Advocate Joseph Holt “concluded that because of her patriotism, her exposure to peril, and her hardship during imprisonment, she constituted an almost isolated [case] in the history of the rebellion; and to signalize and perpetuate it as such would seem to be desirable.”⁹⁸ The honor guard at President Lincoln’s funeral also received the MOH.

A group of MOH awardees formed the Medal of Honor Legion in 1890 and asked the Army and Navy to strike all previous awards from the record that did not involve enemy contact. Major General John Schofield responded with an order that, for the first time, officially recognized the difference between heroism and service in the award criteria. The order stated that “Medals of Honor should be awarded to officers or enlisted men for distinguished bravery in action, while Certificates of Merit should, under the law, be awarded for distinguished service, whether in action or otherwise, of a valuable character to the United States. . . .”⁹⁹ This distinction was groundbreaking, but significantly, the order stated that the Certificate of Merit be awarded only for actions that brought distinction to the United States. In contrast, the MOH was to be awarded to individuals in victory or defeat. The first awards to the six survivors of the Andrews train raid established that precedent.¹⁰⁰

In 1897, the War Department strengthened the criteria for the MOH in an executive order that stated:

In order that the Congressional Medal of Honor may be deserved, service must have been

⁹⁸ Mikaelian, 12, 1-18.

⁹⁹ Ibid., xxi.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

performed in action of such a conspicuous character as to clearly distinguish the man for gallantry and intrepidity above his comrades – service that involves extreme jeopardy of life or the performance of extraordinarily hazardous duty. Recommendations for the decoration will be judged by this standard of extraordinary merit, and incontestable proof of performance of the service will be exacted.¹⁰¹

The order established stringent requirements for the MOH, meaning that few would qualify for the award. This heightened reverence for the award, but raised its criteria to the extent that many heroic acts would go unrecognized.

President Theodore Roosevelt enhanced the MOH's prestige in 1905, when he ordered formal presentation ceremonies to be hosted by the Commander in Chief and held at the White House. Roosevelt added a bit of theatricality to MOH presentations, but the President understood the psychological impact receiving the award from the Commander in Chief held. Although this action elevated the MOH's prestige, it did so only slightly because only one other award existed at the time.¹⁰²

In 1916, Congress passed a comprehensive national defense act to prepare the United States to enter World War I. One of the Act's provisions established a review board to "ascertain what medals of honor, if any, have been awarded or issued for any cause other than distinguished conduct by an officer or enlisted man in action involving actual conflict with an enemy."¹⁰³ Any awards identified were to be stricken from the record. This was the first effort to strengthen the meaning of the MOH by restricting the number of awardees.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Robert E. Wyllie, *Decorations and Insignia, Military and Civil: With the History and Romance of their Origin and a Full Description of Each* (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1921), 42.

¹⁰² Mikaelian, xxii.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, xxiii.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

Nelson Miles served as president of the review board. He felt uncomfortable with his task, in part, because he had written two MOH recommendations for civilian scouts during the Indian Wars sure to be rescinded by the parameters imposed on the board. Miles proposed that Congress recognize previous awards and implement new criteria for future decorations, but his request fell on deaf ears. The board identified 911 of 2,625 awards that did not meet the new requirements, and the War Department struck all of them from the rolls.¹⁰⁵

The introduction of lower awards was the most concrete administrative action taken to enhance the prestige of the MOH. Between 1918 and 1919, Congress created the Distinguished Service Cross and the Silver Star to recognize valor, and the Distinguished Service Medal to recognize extraordinary service not involving combat. These new awards allowed acts of gallantry to be recognized at a lower standard than that of the MOH, reducing the temptation to exaggerate battlefield endeavors. As such, their creation elevated the MOH by virtue of its comparison to lesser awards.¹⁰⁶

This was the beginning of the modern military awards system. This expansion was due, in part, to the creation of a modern national military in World War I. As historian Jennifer Keene argues, “President Woodrow Wilson’s decision in 1917 to form a national conscripted army touched the lives of practically all Americans,” and it was obvious to the War Department and the White House that few of the 3.9 million men serving in the armed forces would qualify for the MOH.¹⁰⁷ This undoubtedly contributed to the decision to expand the awards system. The War Department viewed awards as a method of increasing “aggressiveness on the battlefield,” but

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., xxiii-xxv.

¹⁰⁶ Wyllie, 15-16; Mikaelian, xxv; Murphy, 2.

¹⁰⁷ Jennifer D. Keene, *Doughboys, the Great War, and the Remaking of America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 8-9.

Keene identifies an important aspect of award psychology by noting a negative effect on soldiers who did not earn an award. During World War I, support soldiers criticized the Army for not having any achievable awards for them. The Army and Navy did not act on these complaints, likely because the war was over before the issue mattered, but also because no one yet recognized the negative aspect of awards.¹⁰⁸

During World War II, the military added five new awards for service, valor, or meritorious achievement in order to expand award eligibility and acknowledge the contributions of a wider group of service members.¹⁰⁹ The military buildup before and during World War II also encompassed a bureaucratic expansion, which included, for the first time, Army and Navy internal decoration boards. The boards operated at the division level and above, and passed each case to its higher commander with a recommendation for approval or disapproval. This process repeated itself at each level of command until the award reached its final adjudicating authority.¹¹⁰ Despite the expansion of bureaucracy and the awards system, however, the military still had little experience with processing awards. In World War II the Army grew by 8.1 million people, and Secretary of War Robert P. Patterson admitted that “many a soldier whose conduct merits recognition does not get formal recognition by way of a decoration.”¹¹¹ This was the first American war to witness widespread grumbling about awards. Many veterans claimed men received awards who did not earn them, while men who deserved awards did not receive them.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 58.

¹⁰⁹ D. T. Zabecki, “Medals and Decorations,” in *Companion to American Military History Vol. 2*, ed. J. Bradford (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 904-06.

¹¹⁰ Murphy, 5.

¹¹¹ Elliott V. Converse III, et al., *The Exclusion of Black Soldiers from the Medal of Honor in World War II: The Study Commissioned by the United States Army to Investigate Racial Bias in the Awarding of the Nation’s Highest Military Decoration*, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1997), 37.

The complaints also reflected how veterans had internalized award symbolism by the end of World War II.

The War Department delegated authority to award lesser decorations and service medals to field commands in order to spread the administrative load and make response time quicker, but it retained authority over the MOH. The War Department Decorations Board considered each MOH packet when it reached them, and submitted the packet to the service Chief of Staff and Secretary of War with its recommendation on approval. Some cases, however, never reached the War Department because subordinate commands did not always understand the process.¹¹²

The addition of lower awards created confusion because of the difficulty in determining what level of heroism a particular act demonstrated. Army Regulation 600-45 described the formal criteria for MOH consideration as performing an act of “gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life” that if not done “would not justly subject [the individual] to censure as for shortcoming or failure in the performance of his duty.”¹¹³ The criteria for the Silver Star and Distinguished Service Cross also called for “heroism,” while both the MOH and the Silver Star required “gallantry.” Whether one committed an act of heroism that was “above and beyond the call of duty,” or simply “extraordinary,” determined his respective eligibility for the MOH or the Distinguished Service Cross. The War Department considered the problem, but opted for ambiguity rather than an overly proscriptive system that likely would have reduced the number of awards issued during the war.¹¹⁴

¹¹² Ibid., 37-38.

¹¹³ Ibid., 38.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 38-39.

The attempts to limit the number of MOH's awarded worked. At the end of World War II only 433 of over 13 million servicemen received the award.¹¹⁵ The most significant fact regarding those recipients is that 243, or 56 percent, were posthumous awards, a fact that shrouded the MOH in death and sacrifice.¹¹⁶ The reverence given the MOH also heightened the respect shown to living recipients, since survival of the ordeal that earned them the award stood in stark contrast to the silent majority. Because World War II touched virtually everyone in the U. S., the MOH became a medium through which civilians could participate in military glory. By 1950, the MOH symbolized individual heroism, national sacrifice, and broad American values.

Military psychologists recognize awards as part of the larger system of control and authority wielded by officers over enlisted soldiers. Within that system, awards provide a positive inducement for behavior, as opposed to punishment and discipline. While militaries often issue awards to recognize heroism or other desired types of behavior to inspire similar acts, awards more frequently have a negative effect. Psychologist Anthony Kellett quotes a British soldier in World War I as saying, "I have known good men eat their hearts through want of recognition. How petty this sounds. Yet a ribbon is the only prize in war for the ordinary soldier. It is the outward visible proof to bring home to his people that he had done his job well. And, say what you may, a man's prowess will be assessed by the number of his ribbons."¹¹⁷ Receiving an award does not matter so much as not receiving an award. This does much to explain the persistent granting of campaign ribbons to every soldier just for participating, no matter how inconsequential they are to the success of the campaign.

¹¹⁵ Murphy, 5; Converse, et al., 38.

¹¹⁶ Murphy, 5.

¹¹⁷ Anthony Kellett, "The Soldier in Battle: Motivational and Behavioral Aspects of the Combat Experience," in *Psychological Dimensions of War*, ed. Betty Glad (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1990), 221.

The importance of medals increases over time as they become the only tangible reminders a veteran has of his or her exploits. Official citations contextually frame memory for veterans, and bridge the inevitable chasm between themselves and civilians. This common experience among veterans leads them to show concern for fellow servicemen not receiving awards. Korean War veteran Darrell Heiliger expressed a commonly held belief when he said, “I heard that often some men who deserved them were passed by, and others who didn’t were decorated.”¹¹⁸ Harold Putnam echoed Heiliger when asked if he thought the award system was fair, in the process illuminating a common flashpoint in the ubiquitous tension between officers and enlisted soldiers: “Promised awards not given. Too many acts of heroism under awarded at enlisted level, over awarded to officers, especially career officers.”¹¹⁹ The Eighth Army awarded over 210, 000 medals during the Korean War, and that number would have been much higher had it included the Combat Infantry Badge, campaign ribbons, and service awards.¹²⁰ The meaning attached to these symbols was so important to Korean War veteran Willie J. Eaglin that he fought ten times longer than the war lasted to get his medals. On June 28, 1984, he received word from the Army that his medals were on the way.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Darrel W. Heiliger, KW773, Army Service (Korean War) Questionnaire Collection, Department of the Army, U. S. Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle Barracks, PA. Hereafter cited as Questionnaire.

¹¹⁹ Harold L. Putnam, KW383, Questionnaire.

¹²⁰ “War Service Award Total Tops 100,000,” *Washington Post*, August 23, 1953.

¹²¹ Stephen C. Engelking to Willie J. Eaglin, June 28, 1984, KW707, Questionnaire.

Chapter 5

Return to Gloom

The public mood improved following the Inchon landing but was short lived. The White House, the Joint Chiefs, and MacArthur sold the early disasters as a necessary hardship on the path to victory so well that it blinded them to the threat of Chinese intervention. Truman achieved his primary goals of pushing the North Koreans back across the 38th parallel and reestablishing South Korea's government in Seoul. Flushed with success, the administration became overconfident and updated its policy goals to include the pursuit and complete destruction of the NKPA. Battlefield success led to arrogance in Far East Command, and MacArthur's sycophantic intelligence officer made his reports conform to MacArthur's pronouncement that the Chinese would not intervene. Signs of Chinese intervention were there for anyone who wanted to see them. China had already stated that it would view the U. S. crossing the 38th parallel as an act of aggression, but U. S. officials focused on the Russian threat, viewing the Chinese as just another puppet regime. As American forces approached the Yalu River, the dividing line between China and Korea, the Chinese sprung their trap. Unprepared for winter and shocked at their sudden turn of fortune, American units found themselves in the longest retreat in American history. Press coverage returned to reality, and public approval of Truman and the war sank. Truman's Congressional foes hammered the administration, not for crossing the 38th parallel, but for not expanding the war to the Chinese mainland. When the Eighth Army finally recovered, the White House and the Army again turned to the MOH as a way to alter memory and influence public opinion. To combat low morale, the Army internally publicized the MOH to inspire heroic behavior.

To the Yalu

The U. S. and U. N. restored South Korea to its pre-invasion borders by the end of September 1950, a success for which Democrats in Washington happily took credit. Looking to the mid-term elections in November, Democrats feared that the enthusiasm of victory would fade. They wanted to prolong that enthusiasm in order to maintain their hold on Congress, and with the NKPA broken, crossing the 38th parallel seemed like an easy way to do it. Unfortunately for the thousands of soldiers and Korean civilians who would die over the next two years, MacArthur was only too happy to comply.

There were other, less nefarious motivations behind this decision. A unified and democratic Korea would provide an ally for the U. S. and bolster the legitimacy of the U. N. as the total loss of North Korea to the communist world would have made a punishing statement to the international community on the consequences of cross-border aggression. In September, the administration embarked upon a campaign to sell the invasion of North Korea to the American public and its international allies.¹²²

The JCS instructed MacArthur to proceed with crossing the 38th parallel as long as the Soviets and Chinese did not intervene. Truman stressed this point in NSC-81/1, which formally announced support for crossing the 38th parallel. He remained adamant, however, that the U. S. must avoid creating a general Asiatic war. The JCS message to MacArthur stated:

Your military objective is the destruction of the North Korean armed forces. In attaining this objective, you are authorized to conduct military operations, including amphibious and airborne landings or ground operations north of the 38th parallel in Korea, provided that at the time of such operations there has been no announcement of intended entry, nor a threat to counter our operations militarily in North Korea. Under no circumstances, however, will your forces cross the Manchurian or U. S. S. R. borders of Korea and, as a matter of policy, no non-Korean ground forces will be used in the northeast provinces bordering the Soviet Union or in the area along the Manchurian border. Furthermore, support of your operations north or

¹²² Casey, 97-99.

south of the 38th Parallel will not include air or naval action against Manchuria or against U. S. S. R. territory.¹²³

Overconfident, MacArthur was blind to the Chinese threat as the U. S. and U. N. invasion of North Korea drew the Chinese into a new phase of the war.

MacArthur divided his forces into the Eighth Army and the X Corps. He ordered the Eighth Army to attack north from Seoul, towards Pyongyang and west of the Taebaek Mountain Range, and X Corps to conduct an amphibious assault on the eastern shore of North Korea. X Corps consisted of the 1st Marine Division and the Army's 7th Infantry Division. Both the Eighth Army and X Corps operated as autonomous commands, reporting directly to MacArthur's headquarters in Tokyo. The operation did not go as planned. X Corps was stuck at sea much longer than anticipated, while the Eighth Army encountered little resistance. The lack of resistance in the Eighth Army's sphere of operations encouraged confidence and created a widespread rumor that American forces would be home by Christmas.¹²⁴

A ROK Army battalion reached the Yalu River on October 25, later that day interrogating prisoners who admitted to being Chinese. Over the next four days, Chinese Communist Forces defeated the ROK Army near Chosan, Onjong, and Huichon, yet the Eighth Army and Far East Command reported that it did not believe there was "substantial Chinese participation" in the fighting.¹²⁵ The engagements were limited and reconnaissance flights showed no movement

¹²³ Hastings, 118.

¹²⁴ Roy E. Appleman, *Disaster in Korea: The Chinese Confront MacArthur* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1989), 29-30; Hastings, 119.

¹²⁵ Whelan, 243.

across the Yalu River, but the Chinese had infiltrated 180,000 soldiers into North Korea by moving at night and maintaining strict noise and light discipline.¹²⁶

Even after four weeks of escalating fighting, the U. S. command remained unaware of the magnitude of Chinese intervention. Finally, on November 28, MacArthur sent a message to the JCS expressing his belief “that a crisis existed in Korea.”¹²⁷ He claimed the CCF had gained strategic initiative by stopping the Eighth Army’s drive in the west and successfully executing a surprise attack on X Corps in the east. MacArthur called it “an entirely new war,” and ordered the Eighth Army and X Corps to withdraw from their northern positions towards Pyongyang after a conference with General Walker and General Ned Almond, X Corps commander.¹²⁸ Unfortunately, it was too late, as the Chinese had already drawn the Americans into a trap.

The Eighth Army began retreating on November 28, while on its right flank, the U. S. 2nd Division started its withdrawal one day later. The CCF launched its first full-scale offensive against the Americans as they withdrew. The 2nd Division suffered over 3,000 casualties on November 29, but X Corps suffered even more when the CCF ambushed its Marines and the U. S. Army 7th Regiment near the Chosin Reservoir. As word of the attacks spread through the ranks, a sense of panic overwhelmed many of the men. An orderly retreat once again turned into disastrous panic. In contrast, under the inspired leadership of Major General Oliver P. Smith, and with some help from the 7th Regiment, the Marines stood firm and fought their way out of a terrible situation with their pride and cohesion intact.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Ibid., 244-45.

¹²⁷ Appleman, *Disaster in Korea*, 244.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 244, 247-51.

¹²⁹ John C. McManus, *The 7th Infantry Regiment: Combat in an Age of Terror: The Korean War Through the Present* (New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 2008), 32-45; Whelan, 263-64.

December 1950 witnessed the disastrous retreat of American forces and a return to the gloomy mood of July and August. Winter's onset compounded the situation as temperatures dropped below zero. In addition to the earlier themes of fatigue, sorrow, and stoicism, correspondence from Korea during this period emphasized the harsh winter cold and mountainous terrain. The CCF's enormous size, often described by American servicemen as hordes, also dominated descriptions of the fighting. Captain Norman Allen expressed this view in a December letter to his mother:

Boy, have things become a damn mess!! Everyone is running. There are only a few effectives left. The divisions have lost much equipment in these night withdrawals and especially the ambushes. . . . It seems to me a crime to give up Korea after all it has cost us. But there is no holding the place if the Chinese want it. Even with complete air superiority, they can't be stopped. The Chinks are in droves and herds. Jesus, but I never saw so many. Squeeze off a round, watch one fold, suddenly two more appear, take his place and keep coming.¹³⁰

Others remembered the temperature being near zero, lack of food and sleep, and the pitiful state of refugees. September's enthusiasm gave way to poor morale as the Chinese pushed U. S. and ROK Army forces back across the 38th parallel.

Expanding the war to the Chinese mainland became a divisive issue within the U. S., and news reports from Korea, like Homar Bigart's description of the 2nd Division's fight as "slaughter" and "ghastly," fed growing public pessimism. The Pentagon sent Army Chief of Staff Joe Collins to Korea to get the truth about what was happening. Unsurprisingly, he reported that no disaster was in the making. The administration spent the next two weeks trying to quell debate and build support for maintaining limited objectives, but this was complicated by the reality that the Eighth Army was in full retreat.¹³¹

¹³⁰ Knox, *Pusan to Chosin*, 654.

¹³¹ Casey, 132. 136-42; Whelan, 280.

MacArthur's headquarters blamed reporters for the growing pessimism surrounding the war, and insisted that reporters had blown events out of proportion by misrepresenting limited tactical engagements as strategic setbacks. Much as they had the previous July and August, reporters fought back, arguing information from MacArthur's headquarters lacked credibility. Correspondents wrote of low morale, freezing temperatures, and ragged soldiers retreating in the face of overwhelming forces, while some openly questioned the logic behind the positioning of U. S. units.¹³² By mid-January, negative reports, partisan bickering, and haunting images of broken soldiers combined to create a negative image of the war. The White House and the Army launched a public relations effort, including publicizing the MOH, to improve their relationship with the press in hopes that it would result in more positive reports.

Publicizing the Medal of Honor

The first MOH presentation ceremony of the Korean War took place on January 9, 1951. The timing was due, in part, to the administrative process required for MOH nominations, but the drastic turn of events witnessed in December and January also played a role. On January 4, General Matthew Ridgway, elevated to command of the Eighth Army, ordered his forces to abandon Seoul because he did not think his men could hold the line. The CCF nearly destroyed X Corps and pushed American units south of the 38th parallel. The Eighth Army established a defensive line near Osan, approximately forty miles south of Seoul, where Ridgway hoped to rebuild his men's confidence.¹³³

¹³² Casey, 149-50.

¹³³ Whelan, 280-82.

Against this backdrop the White House and the Army targeted both the home front and the soldiers fighting in Korea with MOH publicity. On the home front the MOH connected individuals to the war through heroic descriptions and public ceremonies. The presentation ceremony was carefully planned, starting with a press release announcing its date and time. A *Washington Post* article on January 1, 1951, announced that the wives of General Dean and First Lieutenant Frederick Henry would receive the MOH in lieu of their husbands, and also reminded readers of the previous October when Truman had first announced Dean's award.¹³⁴ The Army released a description of Henry's actions, as told by a member of his platoon, on January 4. The story emphasized the enemy's overwhelming numerical superiority and Henry's self-sacrifice for his fellow soldiers.¹³⁵ The Army released General Dean's story, as recounted by one of his aides, the next day. The article stated that "Big Bill Dean ... was last seen helping stragglers and wounded near Taejon after he single-handedly attacked an enemy tank armed only with a hand grenade."¹³⁶ The story both embellished Dean's individual actions and oversimplified the context of the event to make it appear more audacious and gripping. Like Henry's story, Dean's emphasized his front line heroics for the sake of others and the size of the enemy. With Dean, the Army subtly crafted a positive memory of the public's one fighting hero of the Korean War into the crisis in confidence of January 1951. No one expected MOH publicity to create an immediate, sweeping change of opinion over the war, but Truman and Army officials understood the emotional effect of the award's symbolism and used it for maximum effect.

¹³⁴ "Wives of Missing Dean, Henry to Receive Medal of Honor," *Washington Post*, January 1, 1951.

¹³⁵ "Truman to Award Medal of Honor to Henry's Wife," *Washington Post*, January 4, 1951.

¹³⁶ "Aide to Dean Tells of His Heroic Stand," *Washington Post*, January 5, 1951.

Ceremony plans included detailed timelines and task assignments, including invitations and arrangements for press coverage. Media coverage was a high priority. The schedule of events for each ceremony always included time for the President to have photographs taken with the recipient and/or family members. These photos, reproduced in newspapers across the country, created a positive visual image of the Commander in Chief or a senior member of the American high command, with a heroic soldier or his family. The public ceremonies acknowledged the recipient's sacrifice and heroism, which held great meaning for all involved, but they also altered memory by honoring individual exploits out of their broader operational context. The somber nature of the public ceremony encouraged audiences to accept this altered memory, imbued with anachronistic meaning, to create a positive image. The White House and the Army hoped that this positive image would counteract the negative conception of the war created by reports and images from the frontlines.¹³⁷

Truman used Korea's first MOH award ceremony to remind the public of General Dean's heroism and connected his individual actions to the eventual success at Inchon. This was an intentionally positive message meant to restore the public's hope for victory in the war. A skilled politician, Truman seized on a bit of good news from the battlefield to publicize the next batch of MOH awards. After Ridgway established a new battle line near Osan, he launched progressively larger operations that restored his men's confidence. He also benefitted from the CCF reaching the extent of their supply line capability, which greatly reduced their ability to launch offensive operations.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ R. P. Carlson to K. R. Belieu, December 2, 1952, Box 271, RG 319, Records of the Army Staff, Chief of Staff, Secretary, General Staff Security Classified General Correspondence, 1948-1954, 1951-1952, 200.3 to 200.63. Hereafter cited as RG 319.

¹³⁸ Hastings, 188-191.

The Eighth Army launched small offensive actions across its line in January and early February. Ridgway focused his efforts on reconnaissance to gather information on the CCF, believing that if the Eighth Army could hold the line and wear the enemy down enough, an opportunity for a major counterattack would present itself. Ridgway launched Operations Killer and Ripper in late February and early March, resulting in the recapture Seoul and restoring the battle line at roughly the 38th parallel.¹³⁹ During this time the Army noted that all of its MOH awards had been presented posthumously, or were earned by prisoners of war. The Army wanted a living MOH recipient to publicize on the home front.

Defense Secretary George C. Marshall expressed his concern over the lack of living MOH recipients in a letter to Joe Collins. Marshall thought that “in the normal course of events someone should perform a feat worthy of the Congressional Medal of Honor and live to tell about it.”¹⁴⁰ He did not order Collins to find a living recipient, but Collins understood the message. Collins was already aware of the situation, evidenced by a report from March 1951 listing eleven posthumous awards and three to prisoners of war.¹⁴¹ He likely forwarded the report to Marshall while notifying MacArthur of the situation. Collins suggested that MacArthur pull nominees for the MOH off the frontlines so the Army could bring a living recipient back to Washington “for appropriate high level ceremonies.”¹⁴² A living recipient offered the chance to present a smiling G. I. describing his own exploits to the public, but it also showed soldiers that heroic acts did necessarily cost them their lives.

¹³⁹ Blair, 728-29, 737-52.

¹⁴⁰ George C. Marshall to J. Lawton Collins, April 3, 1951, Box 271, RG 319.

¹⁴¹ Edward H. Brooks to J. Lawton Collins, March 12, 1951, Box 271, RG 319.

¹⁴² J. Lawton Collins to Douglas MacArthur, March 12, 1951, Box 271, RG 319

On the home front, MOH publicity counterbalanced negative press coverage by putting a positive face on the war and by allowing civilians to connect with the battlefield through heroic acts. The Army publicized the MOH within its ranks to alter memory and to psychologically inspire emulation. This was particularly important in light of soldiers' poor performance during the early weeks of the war and after Chinese intervention. This effort coincided with Ridgway's assumption of command and rapid improvement of the Eighth Army's effectiveness. Army Chief of Information Major General F. L. Parks recognized the potential to influence soldier behavior by connecting the Commander in Chief's words to the powerful symbolism of the MOH. He released a memorandum to the service secretaries in January that included a quote from President Truman at a MOH ceremony. Truman commended ground troops' sacrifice in the cause of freedom, and Parks directed that "it will be given the widest publicity we can attain, especially in service journals."¹⁴³ Reproducing quotes from the Commander in Chief in internal print media was just one way of reinforcing the type of behavior the Army wanted to see in its soldiers.

Distributing official citations represented a second method for reinforcing positive behavior. Lieutenant General Edward H. Brooks, in charge of the Army's personnel system, directed subordinate units to publish official citations in a "distinctive format," and to post them in conspicuous areas like unit bulletin boards. The instructions also included an order to Troop Information and Education Officers to distribute "copies of the quotations from the President's speech" as widely as possible through all media types.¹⁴⁴ The Department of the Army reproduced the citations as General Orders on a single sheet bordered with large stars. On the back of the orders a directive from General Collins stated, "This general order will be read to all

¹⁴³ F. L. Parks to Service Secretaries, January 9, 1951, Box 271, RG 319.

¹⁴⁴ Edward H. Brooks to Subordinate Units, January 9, 1951, Box 271, RG 319.

troops and will be posted conspicuously on the bulletin boards in each unit area."¹⁴⁵ Distributing information in this war represented the most efficient way of ensuring that soldiers heard the type of behavior the Army expected of them.

Recommenders submitted nominations for the MOH on War Department Form 639, Recommendation for Award – Heroism (WD639), which included space for narrative descriptions of the mission, enemy situation, and the acts of the nominated individual. Sworn statements accompanied this form along with map sketches and a proposed citation.¹⁴⁶

Decoration and Award Boards often returned the packets for clarifications or additional evidence. No one wanted to award the MOH to someone who did not deserve it, and nothing in the records suggests any undue political influence was applied in any particular case.

Recommenders constructed a proposed citation from the sworn statements, but they were usually revised several times. In some units, commanders issued a model citation to facilitate the process.¹⁴⁷

The event descriptions contained in the official citations intentionally contrasted with the individualistic attitude that prevailed during the July and November-December retreats. Master Sergeant Melvin O. Handrich's citation stated that his company was almost annihilated by the enemy. Handrich "voluntarily left" a relatively safe place to direct artillery fire "with complete disregard for his own safety" while exposing himself to heavy enemy fire. According to the citation, Handrich refused to leave his position to protect the withdrawal of his men. The

¹⁴⁵ Department of the Army General Order 31, March 21, 1952, Jerome A. Sudut, Folder 2, Box 1385, RG 338, Records of the U. S. Army Operational, Tactical, and Support Organizations (World War II and Thereafter) Eighth Army, 1944-56, Adjutant General Section Awards Case Files for Medal of Honor and other Decorations 1950-51. Hereafter cited as RG 338.

¹⁴⁶ WD Form 639, Recommendation for Award of Medal of Honor to David A. Hurr, April 7, 1951, Folder 1950-1951, Box 1385, RG 338.

¹⁴⁷ Note 3, WD Form 96, Disposition Form for Reuben E. Jenkins, Folder Edge-Jensen, Box 1383, RG 338.

citation's final sentence states that "M[aster]/Sgt. Handrich's sustained personal bravery, consummate courage, and gallant self-sacrifice reflect untold glory upon himself and the heroic traditions of the military service."¹⁴⁸ This specific description of Handrich's actions contrasts distinctly with battlefield reports in newspapers and magazines, while the last sentence features hyperbolic language meant to inspire men in the ranks.

Handrich's case also offers a good example of the Army's attempts to influence opinion by altering memory of the past. The Eighth Army recommended Handrich's nomination be downgrade to a Distinguished Service Cross, but the Department of the Army approved it for the MOH.¹⁴⁹ To the Eighth Army, the similar language of the DSC achieved the same purpose of reinforcing behavior as did the MOH. The Army had a broader view however, and awarded Handrich the MOH both to recognize his heroism and alter memory of the previous August.

The case of Captain Lewis Millett provides another excellent example of the Army's use of the MOH to influence behavior. Millett commanded a company of the 27th Regiment during February 1951. His nomination packet undoubtedly benefitted from the inclusion of a letter from S. L. A. Marshall, who conducted after-action reviews with the company on February 12.¹⁵⁰ Millett's men noted his courage in leading multiple bayonet assaults into enemy lines. This was exactly the type of behavior Ridgway was looking for in his officers. In his endorsement of the MOH nomination, Ridgway suggested to the IX Corps commander that the after-action report would "make good reading for every infantryman."¹⁵¹ Major General Bryant E. Moore promptly

¹⁴⁸ Kenneth N. Jordan, Sr., *Forgotten Heroes: 131 Men of the Korean War Awarded the Medal of Honor 1950-1953* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing, 1995), 29.

¹⁴⁹ Case File of Melvin O. Handrich, Folder 2, Box 1386, RG 338.

¹⁵⁰ S. L. A. Marshall to John H. Michaelis, Case File of Lewis L. Millett, Folder 2 1951, Box 1385, RG 338.

¹⁵¹ Matthew B. Ridgway to Bryant E. Moore, Case File of Lewis L. Millett, Folder 2 1951, Box 1385, RG 338.

instructed his subordinate units that “this paper be read to every infantry company of the IX Corps at the first opportunity. At the same time, leaders will take the opportunity of explaining to their men how effective charges are with marching fire and the bayonet against the present enemy.”¹⁵² To maximize the impact of this nomination, Commanders bypassed the average four month approval period by immediately reading the after-action review to their soldiers, understanding that the nomination would be discussed with the after-action report. Senior commanders hoped that MOH nominations would impact behavior as much as the award itself. As an added bonus, Millett was a living recipient.

The award of the MOH to Private First Class William Thompson provides another key example of this type of inspirational usage. Thompson was a member of the all-black 24th Regiment that earned a terrible reputation during the early weeks of the war due to racial bias and the Regiment’s poor battlefield performance. The 24th Regiment performed no worse than many white units, but rampant distrust within the organization exacerbated an already bad situation. Integration began in August 1950 because there were not enough white replacements. When Truman ordered integration in 1949, the Army dragged its feet, but the war catalyzed rapid change. By October most observers, and an Eighth Army investigation, recommended immediate, full integration of units, but Walker deemed it administratively impossible to deactivate an entire regiment at that time. Nevertheless, the Army recognized the need for measures to bolster black soldiers’ confidence, and viewed the MOH as a way to inspire them.¹⁵³

Thompson’s commander nominated him posthumously for the MOH in January 1951 for actions taken in August 1950. The packet proceeded through various command levels without

¹⁵² Bryant E. Moore to IX Corps Commanders, Case File of Lewis Millett, RG 338.

¹⁵³ William T. Bowers, William M. Hammond, and George MacGarrigle, *Black Soldier, White Army: The 24th Infantry Regiment in Korea* (Washington, D. C.: Center of Military History, U. S. Army, 1996), 267, 159-60, 189.

incident, earning high praise from senior officials. The Army approved Thompson for the MOH on April 30, 1951.¹⁵⁴ The citation emphasized his lone stand against a larger enemy force allowed “his platoon to withdraw to a more tenable position,” even while he was “hit repeatedly by grenade fragments and small-arms fire.”¹⁵⁵ This citation, like those for white soldiers, emphasized these heroic individual acts contrasted with general reports of disorder from the early weeks of the war. This packet also signaled a great social step forward for the U. S. Army, awarding a black soldier the nation’s highest award for valor less than one year into the war after the MOH was denied to black soldiers in World War II.

The White House paid close attention to the status of MOH nominations, requiring the Army Adjutant General’s Office to send regular updates. This process reached peak efficiency in early 1952 after the front lines had settled, leaving units with more time to devote to administrative tasks.¹⁵⁶ The stalemated war slowly faded from the press, and the White House had less need of a counterweight to bad news. The use of the MOH to influence opinion and inspire soldiers was most important in early 1951, but for the duration of the war publicity surrounding the award continued to alter memory and emphasize desired behavior.

The White House and the Army countered negative reports and imagery with a steady stream of positive statements, heroic citations, and photographs depicting smiling families at MOH ceremonies. The design of the ceremony made connecting these small, often isolated, events to a larger war narrative believable. The Army publicized the MOH within its ranks to inspire acts of heroism after the generally poor performance of its soldiers in July and November-December. At

¹⁵⁴ Case File of William Thompson, Folder 2, Box 1386, RG 338.

¹⁵⁵ Jordan, 26.

¹⁵⁶ William E. Bergen to Secretary of the General Staff, April 23, 1952, Box 271, RG 319.

the end of April 1951 the public dispute between General MacArthur and President Truman came to a head, and, by summer, the war settled into a stalemate. MacArthur's recall, battlefield stalemate, and the rise of McCarthyism gave a new purpose to MOH publicity.

Chapter 6

Stalemate War

General MacArthur was a celebrated hero in the U. S., and his recall from Tokyo for subverting White House policy in Korea caused a tremendous, albeit temporary, stir over what the U. S. hoped to achieve in the war. MacArthur and his supporters argued that the U. S. could achieve total victory if Truman would permit bombing the Chinese mainland. Truman and his advocates maintained that a limited commitment both contained communist aggression and prevented World War III. As the war settled into a stalemate, the Korean War looked like a mistake to many Americans. After mid-1951 American, Korean, and Chinese troops fought over hills and mountain ranges to win leverage at the negotiation table. The end of maneuver warfare in Korea signaled the end of widespread public interest in the war. The Korean War was already being forgotten just one year after it started, even as Cold War rhetoric heated up. Republicans had long accused the Truman administration of being soft on communism, but the twin issues of communist propaganda and the brainwashing of POWs intensified during the last two years of the war. The MOH continued to acknowledge incredible acts of bravery on the battlefield, but for the remainder of the war its publicity emphasized social inclusion and toughness on communism.

MacArthur Sacked

In March 1951, the State Department drafted a resolution offering a cease-fire to the Chinese. The JCS solicited MacArthur's opinion on the offer, but he urged "that no further military restrictions be imposed upon the United Nations Command in Korea."¹⁵⁷ MacArthur promptly

¹⁵⁷ Alexander, 406.

released his own statement insisting China had “been shown its complete inability to accomplish by force of arms the conquest of Korea,” and offered “to confer in the field with the commander in chief of the enemy forces in an earnest effort to find any military means whereby the realization of the political objectives of the United Nations in Korea, to which no nation may justly take exception, might be accomplished without further bloodshed.”¹⁵⁸ MacArthur established national policy with this statement, completely subverting civilian control of the military. Truman, however, was not yet ready to fire him.

Republican Joe Martin read a private letter from MacArthur to Congress on April 5, 1951 that argued there was “no substitute for victory.”¹⁵⁹ The letter directly opposed Truman’s policy of negotiating with the Chinese and led to MacArthur’s recall. The JCS charged MacArthur with inability to carry out his orders, failing to clear public policy statements through the President, and subverting civilian control of the military. The JCS presented their recommendation to Truman, who announced he would relieve MacArthur.¹⁶⁰

Truman believed his limited strategy made sense within the context of the larger Cold War. With that in mind, official statements focused on the need for vigilance to defense against the communist threat on the one hand, and the need to avoid atomic war on the other.¹⁶¹ Even so, evidence suggested that no matter how the White House justified MacArthur’s dismissal, there would be a public backlash. Richard Whelan points out that “the President was burned in effigy in many towns across the country, and many flags were lowered to half-mast.” A wide majority

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 406-07.

¹⁵⁹ Blair, 783.

¹⁶⁰ Whelan, 296; Blair, 786-87.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 245.

of correspondence sent to the White House favored MacArthur, and three state legislatures censured Truman.¹⁶²

General MacArthur's three day testimony opened a joint Senate Foreign Relations and Armed Services Committee hearing that lasted from May 3 to June 25. Despite the initial backlash against Truman, the hearings provided an opportunity for the country to debate its course in both the Korean and Cold Wars. MacArthur's desire to widen the war to achieve total victory lost out. The State and Defense Departments uniformly supported limited commitment to Korea, arguing that total war would reduce diplomatic and military flexibility in the broader Cold War.¹⁶³ With the question of the level of commitment decided, MOH publicity began to emphasize general communism as a threat.

Red Hordes

An article in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* of January 8, 1951, headlined, "Yank Bashes in Skulls of Reds with a Shovel" is an early example of this trend. The opening paragraph of the article bluntly describes the scenario: "A soldier who fired all his ammunition, threw all his grenades, and then bashed in the skulls of Korean Reds with a shovel has been awarded the congressional medal of honor." This graphically violent description laid bare the feelings an American should have for the "Reds," and suggested that they deserved the brutal punishment Brown inflicted with his shovel. The term "Red" or "horde" was common in news reports, and implied that the communists had no individuality, which reinforced images of unthinking masses

¹⁶² Whelan, 303.

¹⁶³ Whelan, 306; Alexander, 416-17.

controlled by Moscow. Individual Americans were heroes by virtue of standing against the “Red hordes.”

The Army was particularly interested in the number of communists involved in any combat action. Commanders typically estimated enemy numbers at a three to one ratio or greater. Sworn statements in MOH recommendation packets commonly used the term “horde” to describe the CCF. A United Press article noted that Lieutenant Samuel S. Coursen jumped into an enemy machine gun pit to save a soldier and “killed seven Reds before he was shot in the back.”¹⁶⁴ Though the article celebrated bravery and self-sacrifice, it emphasized that one American killed seven Communists.

Another article commended Sergeant Travis E. Watkins for fighting “vastly superior forces” and killing six “Red soldiers.”¹⁶⁵ According to the article, Watkins, paralyzed from a wound, directed a battle that killed 500 enemies. The story left out the operational context of his actions, instead focusing on his individual achievements. This created a mental image of Watkins engaged in hand-to-hand fighting against the “Red hordes” for the reader—an image that was, of course, the point. Americans on the home front could fight communism vicariously through heroic winners of the MOH, or they could identify with the war negatively through images and stories of tired, sorrowful, and stoic soldiers. The White House and the Army obviously preferred the former.

Communist Propaganda

¹⁶⁴ “Honor Medals go to 2 More Killed in War,” *Washington Post*, June 16, 1951.

¹⁶⁵ “Honor Medal going to Three GI Casualties,” *Washington Post*, January 6, 1951.

U. S. government officials feared that its soldiers and civilians could be swayed by communist propaganda, particularly those from marginalized sections of society. Historian Aviel Roshwald argues that “the showcasing of the USSR as a harmonious, voluntary community of autonomous nations” was a prominent feature of Soviet propaganda as far back as the early 1920’s.¹⁶⁶ This message originally targeted people of color subjugated by European colonials. The growth of communism between 1920 and 1950 indicated that the message was working. The Korean War brought Americans into contact with the communist message of racial harmony and forced the U. S. to offer inclusion to non-white Americans.

Samuel Fuller’s 1951 motion picture, *The Steel Helmet*, brought racial issues to a mass audience. The movie featured a platoon with an African-American medic, a second generation Japanese-American--or Nisei--soldier, and a gruff, disillusioned white sergeant. In one scene, a captured North Korean Major confronts the black medic, arguing that communism offered equality to blacks. The Major argues that the medic is fighting for a country in which he must ride at the back of a bus and eat in separate diners. The medic replies that those things are true, but lectures the Major on the progress of blacks in the U. S. since slavery. Equality will come, he says, but “some things just take time.”¹⁶⁷

In another scene, the Major quizzes the Nisei, asking if his parents were sent to a camp during World War II. The sergeant, Tanaka, replies that they had. The Major accuses the Nisei of being “idiots” for fighting for the U. S. In a reply that demonstrates the powerful symbolism medals embodied, Tanaka replies, “over three thousand of us idiots got the Purple Heart!”¹⁶⁸ These

¹⁶⁶ Aviel Roshwald, *Ethnic Nationalism and the Fall of Empires: Central Europe, Russia and the Middle East, 1914-1923* (London: Routledge, 2001), 177.

¹⁶⁷ Samuel Fuller, *The Steel Helmet*, DVD, Directed by Samuel Fuller (Lippert, 1951).

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

dialogues targeted white audiences, but raising racial issues in this public forum was an important step.

The White House and the Army used the MOH to change white Americans' attitudes towards non-whites by including people of color in the national pantheon of heroes. One example of this racial aspect in MOH publicity is the announcement of awards granted to Lieutenant Thomas Hudner and Corporal Mitchell Red Cloud. Hudner, a white Navy pilot, won the MOH for trying to save the life of Ensign Jesse L. Brown, the Navy's first black pilot. Even though Brown was not awarded the MOH, a *Washington Post* article featured pictures of all three men, one white, one black, and one American-Indian side-by-side with the subheading "Three American heroes of the fighting in Korea."¹⁶⁹ The CCF shot Brown's aircraft down as he provided air support to Marines during the Chosin battle. Hudner landed his aircraft to rescue Brown, but he was unable to do so. The publicity surrounding this MOH celebrated Hudner's heroism, but also highlighted the racial aspect of the story; a white officer risked his life to save a black officer. By packaging these three together in a news release, the Army intended to reinforce racial cohesion within the military, but also hoped to foster a change in attitudes at home. To reinforce this message, Truman personally presented the MOH to Hudner.

Red Cloud's story was also conspicuous compared to other MOH awards. The Department of Defense reported that Red Cloud was with his unit near Chonghyon, North Korea in November 1950 when the enemy attacked his unit. Although wounded, Red Cloud continued to fire his weapon until killed by the enemy. There are fewer details in this account compared with other reports, and the terms "Reds," "hordes," or "overwhelming numbers" do not appear. Newspapers

¹⁶⁹ "Navy Flier, Indian Corporal Awarded Medals of Honor," *Washington Post*, March 31, 1951.

generally reprinted portions of the official citation that emphasized individual heroism, self-sacrifice, and the impossible odds, but Red Cloud's story drew attention to his race.¹⁷⁰

Prisoners of war and brainwashing became prominent issues as the war settled into stalemate. Conditions for U. S. POWs were deplorable. Captured Army physicians reported after repatriation "that the lack of medicine and health facilities resulted in the needless deaths of countless prisoners."¹⁷¹ The harsh winter of 1950-51 resulted in frostbite for many of the prisoners, but they nevertheless marched with broken legs or other wounds. In the camps prisoners faced contaminated water, interrogation, and mysterious inoculations where one needle was used for as many as twenty men. Captain Gene N. Lam, a captured surgeon, remembered undergoing brainwashing, a process where the Chinese attempted to convert POWs to communism, for ten months, a technique that the Army considered very dangerous.¹⁷²

An estimated 7,000 Americans were POWs during the Korean War, but unlike in other conflicts, few managed to escape. Early studies determined that nearly thirty percent of prisoners collaborated with the communists, causing greater alarm than the almost thirty percent who died in the camps. Twenty-one Americans chose to stay in North Korea rather than be repatriated, a very low proportion of the overall number of prisoners, but one that still caused tremendous alarm. During the last two years of the war many Americans feared brainwashed POWs could infiltrate the U. S. to carry out communist subterfuge.¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Lewis H. Carlson, *Remembered Prisoners of a Forgotten War: An Oral History of Korean War POWs* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002), 151.

¹⁷² Ibid., 152-157.

¹⁷³ Peter Watson, *War on the Mind: The Military Uses and Abuses of Psychology* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), 291-92.

Major William Mayer, an army psychiatrist in Korea, conducted a study of brainwashing techniques. In the first step, the communists destroyed group cohesion by removing leaders to special camps if they did not give in. Once the communists achieved distrust within the group, indoctrination began. Their captors explained to the prisoners that “Imperialist Wall Street Warmongers” were responsible for the war. Communist instructors used articles from the American press to reinforce the idea that the prisoners fought wars for others to get rich.¹⁷⁴ Roy Hardage remembered that inside the building where instruction took place, “on the walls were slogans like ‘Down with the Warmongers’ or ‘You Are Cannon Fodder.’ I had never heard such terms as ‘Money Bags,’ ‘Cannon Fodder,’ or ‘Imperialists’ before in my life.”¹⁷⁵ The communists believed that once a soldier lost faith in America and, by extension, in the reason for his deployment to Korea, he was prepared to accept communism.

The communists segregated POWs by race, hoping to make inroads with marginalized segments of U. S. society. Robert Fletcher, a member of the all-black 24th Regiment, described his experience at the Chinese Camp Five in early 1951:

Every morning an instructor would start roll call. Lin or one of the other English-speaking instructors would give us a little lecture for about a half hour or forty-five minutes. Then we’d break up into groups of ten or so for what they called study groups where we were supposed to discuss what we had just heard. The instructors would compare Communism to capitalism, starting back in the Stone Age with Lenin and Engels versus the Rockefellers and DuPonts. They would talk about when wars started none of the rich go but always the poor people. In the discussion groups we were supposed to discuss all this. The Chinese called me a reactionary because I’d say, “Let’s look at the Second World War. I can talk about that because I was a young man. In Russia, which is a Communist country, who fought the fucking wars there? There was supposed to be no poor and no rich. But everybody was poor.” . . . They didn’t play the race card so much during the interrogations as in the educational sessions. They would remind me that I had said, “You know white people will never let black people accomplish anything in the United States.” So they’d tell me, “They’re always going to control the money, control the jobs, make sure their friends will always have a job, and black

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Carlson, 184.

people will just get so far. What you need to do is go back to your country and help start a revolution. Get the money out of their hands. Get the controls away from the warmongers.” The Chinese did not like white people very much.¹⁷⁶

As Lewis H. Carlson astutely points out, few POWs took this kind of brainwashing seriously and did only what they had to do so to survive. Unfortunately, however “the American public, caught in the throes of Cold War and McCarthy paranoia, the massive Chinese effort to indoctrinate and ‘brainwash’ their captives became the indelible legacy of the Korean War POWs.”¹⁷⁷

From the study of communist brainwashing techniques and their perceived success, psychologists concluded that American soldiers were defective “in character development and self-discipline; in general education, particularly about the operation of a democracy and the multicultural role of the world; and in military preparedness.”¹⁷⁸ This analysis was overly critical, but the POW situation in Korea was unlike anything the Americans had previously experienced. The communist threat seemed greater because its philosophy could penetrate anywhere. “Red” fears on the home front compounded the problem, and perceptions of what American soldiers should act like in captivity were unfairly based on the World War II image of the G. I. The shift away from an idyllic hero to a stoic victim negatively affected Americans’ image of POWs.

In June 1951 the front line was north of the 38th parallel. Ridgway replaced MacArthur in Tokyo as commander of United States Army Far East Command, and General James Van Fleet succeeded Ridgway as Eighth Army commander. Van Fleet was an offensively-minded officer, like Ridgway, and he maintained the momentum that the Eighth Army had gained from

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 191-92.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 192.

¹⁷⁸ Watson, 294.

Ridgway's leadership. Measured offensive operations pushed the Chinese further north, but the Army and the White House feared the manpower available to the Chinese could turn the tide again. Both sides finally started negotiations at Kaesong with low level representatives, a fact that changed the character of the Korean War. There would be no more dramatic maneuvers like MacArthur's Inchon landing. The decrease in the war's drama was paralleled by a decrease in press coverage. As historian Clay Blair says, "It was to become The Forgotten War."¹⁷⁹

The Final Two Years

Truman continued to present the MOH to recipients during the spring and summer months of 1951. As the war faded from public view, MOH press releases grew shorter and less vitriolic towards the "Reds." A number of announcements consisted of a few short paragraphs that only reprinted the portion of the citation commending the individual for bravery above and beyond the call of duty, a line found in all citations. These articles were focused on announcing the award rather than attempting to alter memory. A *Washington Post* article announcing Sergeant George Libby's award stated that he "deliberately laid down his own life in order to help wounded comrades escape from a Communist trap."¹⁸⁰ Libby earned the MOH for actions undertaken during the battle of Taejon, the same battle in which General Dean earned the award, but this article starkly contrasted with the publicity that Dean received in October 1950 and January 1951.

Lieutenant Colonel Don C. Faith, Jr. earned the MOH posthumously on June 17, 1951. The press release announcing the award represented more of an obituary than an inspirational story of

¹⁷⁹ Blair, 939-40.

¹⁸⁰ "Korean War Hero Honored After Death," *Washington Post*, June 20, 1951.

bravery and heroism. The article provided Faith's biographical information and brief quotes from his citation with the usual references to bravery and gallantry. There was no elaboration of his specific actions or the number of enemy killed, and no mention of menacing "Reds."¹⁸¹ In the early months of 1951, MOH publicity assumed an active tone that vicariously connected the reader with battlefield heroes. During the spring of that year, when the Eighth Army was again on the offensive, MOH publicity took on a vitriolic tone against the mindless "Red hordes" to emphasize the communist threat. After the war stalled and public attention decreased, the tone of MOH publicity grew much quieter. The publicity simply recognized that American heroes were still fighting in Korea, and emphasized broader American values.

There was, of course, some overlap in these themes. Captain Raymond Harvey survived the exploits that earned him the MOH, and a June article pointed out that he launched several one-man attacks, killed ten "Reds," and continued on even though wounded.¹⁸² Interestingly, despite being a living recipient, the article does not quote Harvey at all. This may have been due to MOH recipient Master Sergeant Ernest R. Kouma, who, in May, announced to the press that soldiers were "disgusted" over the Korean War because there seemed to be no end in sight.¹⁸³ Clearly, no one coached Kouma on how to handle the press and, therefore, he answered honestly. Harvey may have answered questions too, but, as an officer, he was unlikely to say anything as controversial as had Kouma. The Army recognized the need to put MOH winners in the public eye, but it was apparent that after Kouma, recipients received coaching on what to say.

¹⁸¹ "Medal of Honor for D. C. Man Who Died in Action in Korea," *Washington Post*, June 17, 1951; "3 Get Medals of Honor," *New York Times*, June 17, 1951.

¹⁸² "One Man Raid Wins Captain Honor Medal," *Washington Post*, June 24, 1951.

¹⁸³ "Naktong Hero Coming to U. S. for Top Medal," *Washington Post*, May 7, 1951.

In a June 1951 article, columnist John Crosby wrote that soldiers were cropping up everywhere on television. He said, “The serviceman is all over the place – winning things, telling the true story for the first time anywhere on how he won the Medal of Honor, or just appearing gracefully and modestly on screen while the emcee tells him and us how grateful the Nation is to him.” Crosby also noted, however, that there was evidence that these soldiers were being exploited.¹⁸⁴ He described a scene on a program called “We, the People,” where one of three MOH winners replied to a question about his experiences in Korea with what Crosby called, “lines that had obviously been written for him,” while the other two merely echoed the first’s answer.¹⁸⁵ Crosby argued that the answers were too neat, and that the public deserved to hear what the fighting men actually had to say. Throughout the remainder of the war MOH recipients remained conspicuously quiet.

MOH publicity during the stalemate increasingly emphasized the heroism of recipients as being symbolic of wider American values. Truman, during a July MOH presentation ceremony, said that the recipients were “the backbone of our Government,” and that because of them the U. S. would “win the Cold War.”¹⁸⁶ A picture of Truman with the four awardees standing behind him, proudly displaying the MOH in dress uniforms, reinforced the image of military heroes as the “backbone” of the government. The article contained an overview of each recipient’s exploits, and included a picture of one of the smiling men kneeling to be kissed by his three-year-old son. Another image expressing this idea juxtaposed Korean War MOH recipients with American communists arrested in Los Angeles. The image showed the eleven living recipients

¹⁸⁴ John Crosby, “There’s Something About a Soldier,” *Washington Post*, June 6, 1951.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ “President Honors Four Infantrymen,” *New York Times*, July 6, 1951.

from the Korean War, all but one expressionless and stoic, below the title “Heroes and . . .” The bottom picture depicts ten smiling, laughing communists, convicted of trying to overthrow the U. S. government, being released from jail on bond, titled “. . . Enemies of the Republic.” The implicit argument contained in the images was that heroes fought for American interests, even overseas, while communists subverted the government at home.¹⁸⁷

Between 1952 and 1953, MOH publicity continued to promote American ideals, such as individual bravery and heroism, against the general communist threat, particularly by highlighting awards to non-white soldiers. One article announced, “Hawaiian Soldier Killed in Korea Awarded Honor.” Herbert K. Pililaau earned the MOH for his “one-man stand to cover the withdrawal of his buddies,” and “was credited with killing 40 Communist troops.”¹⁸⁸ These pronouncements showed continuity with earlier themes, but the article’s reference to Pililaau’s race was telling.

African-Americans bought into the idea that the MOH could influence racial attitudes in the U. S. as much as the Army and the White House did. Van Charlton, whose son received the MOH posthumously said, “My son did not give his life in vain for his bravery has now been recognized by the President of the United States and the whole country. And even those persons in America who have felt that the Negroes are second class citizens must in their hearts now know that that isn’t so. My son has proved that the Negro is worthy of the country’s highest honor.”¹⁸⁹ Charlton’s statement demonstrated the success of publicizing African-American MOH

¹⁸⁷ “Heroes and.....Enemies of the Republic,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 21, 1952.

¹⁸⁸ “Hawaiian Soldier Killed in Korea Awarded Honor,” *Washington Post*, May 18, 1952.

¹⁸⁹ “Father Says Hero’s Death Makes Liar of Robeson,” *Washington Post*, February 13, 1952.

winners. Black activists also promoted awarding the MOH to blacks to prevent their falling prey to communist propaganda.

Edgar G. Brown, then president of the National Negro Council, publicly urged President Dwight D. Eisenhower to award the MOH to Courtney L. Stanley, who reportedly held off fifteen communists during a battle in 1953. Brown argued that awarding the MOH to the white officer involved in the same incident, and to Stanley, an African-American, “would be a most effective propaganda weapon in the psychological warfare to win Asiatic and African understanding and friendship for the ways of democracy.”¹⁹⁰ Eisenhower, however, preferred to rely on the existing bureaucratic structure for awarding the MOH since neither man received the award.

After assuming the Presidency, Eisenhower sought a way to extricate the U. S. from the Korean War, but continued Truman’s policy of limited commitment. The issue of POW repatriation had derailed armistice talks since the summer of 1951. After two additional years of fighting, broken truce talks, and strained relations between allies, the belligerent parties signed a cease-fire. The morning of July 27, 1953, witnessed no celebrations. The U. S., representing the U. N., and the Chinese signed an armistice and departed Panmunjom without saying a word to each other.¹⁹¹ Fifty-seven years later, 28,500 American troops remain in South Korea.¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ “Top Medal Urged for 2,” *New York Times*, March 23, 1953.

¹⁹¹ Hastings, 325.

¹⁹² Hyung-Jin Kim, “N. Korea, U. N. Command Officers Hold Talks,” *Army Times*, October 18, 2010, http://www.armytimes.com/news/2010/07/ap_north_korea_un_command_071410/, (accessed October 18, 2010).

Conclusion

The White House and the Army used the Medal of Honor and its publicity to alter American memory of the disastrous early weeks of the war, inspire and reinforce desired behavior in soldiers, and counter communist propaganda. We must question, however, how well that effort worked. It is difficult to measure that answer empirically because the extent to which the MOH motivated actions varied between individuals. Additionally, individuals are often unaware of how symbols affect their behavior. Nevertheless, this study offers at least limited conclusions.

Using MOH publicity to alter the memory of past events appears to have achieved mixed results. MOH citations reprinted in newspapers influenced individual perceptions of past events because the articles distilled complex battlefield events into the story of one man. This contextual scaling made the battlefield easier to understand for those on the home front and certainly altered their image of particular battles. General Dean's case is the best example of this. His citation plucked a few heroic acts out of an overall disaster, and Truman teleologically linked the failed defense of Taejon to the outcome at Inchon. No one, however, questioned this. Even Dean's critics focused on his battlefield actions rather than Truman's interpretation of them.

It does not, however, seem that these individual alterations of memory led to a collective change. While Americans happily accepted that Dean's actions contributed to success at Inchon, their negative perceptions of July and August, created by realistic battlefield imagery and reports, remained unchanged. Many Americans were content to believe both that the early months were a disaster, and that Dean was a hero. In a sense, the MOH added a footnote to the war's narrative. This remained the pattern throughout the war, a fact reflected by the continued

celebration of MOH winners as national heroes, while at the same time public opinion of the war continued to drop.¹⁹³

The Army's ability to inspire soldiers with MOH publicity is also difficult to measure. Psychologists and historians have uncovered myriad reasons why soldiers fight, but medals are not among them. Despite that fact the military continues to believe, at least publicly, that rewarding a soldier with a medal in front of his peers somehow inspires the peers to emulate the behavior described in the citation. Listening to their commander read a MOH citation probably influenced some soldiers in the short term, but it is highly unlikely that the MOH directly inspired them on the battlefield. The fact that MOH winners rarely mention their own awards, much less anyone else's, demonstrates that fact. Awards acknowledge an individual's past actions more than they inspire emulation, but evidence suggests that the MOH reinforces the latent role structure in the Army for enlisted soldiers and officers. In their study of the MOH and military role structures during Vietnam, sociologists Joseph A. Blake and Suellen Butler argue that officers earned the MOH for war-winning actions, while enlisted men earned it for lifesaving actions.¹⁹⁴ This appears to be true for enlisted men in the Korean War as well, but officers received the award for both lifesaving and war-winning. Rather than inspire actions, the MOH seems to have reinforced different types of behavior appropriate for different ranks.

The award system's most immediate effect seems to be its negative effect on those who did not earn an award. This appears to be a shared experience, in that those who received medals still

¹⁹³ Robert B. Smith, "Disaffection, Delegation, and Consequences: Aggregate Trends for World War II, Korea and Vietnam," in *Public Opinion and the Military Establishment*, ed. Charles C. Moskos, Jr. (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1971), 221-251. Smith argues in this chapter that there was greater public dissatisfaction with the limited Korean and Vietnam Wars than with World War II, a total war. His basis for that analysis is a comparison between the three wars of public dissent, Presidential approval, conscientious objector levels, strictness of draft board, and approval of compulsory service measured by public opinion polls.

¹⁹⁴ Joseph A. Blake and Suellen Butler, "The Medal of Honor, Combat Orientations and Latent Role Structure in the United States Military," *Sociological Quarterly* 17, no. 4 (Autumn, 1976): 561-567.

fought for those who did not. Veterans often relate stories of soldiers they knew who deserved an award, but did not receive it. The bureaucracy of the awards system is mostly to blame for this, and illuminates the ever-present tension between officers and enlisted soldiers. Typical of enlisted soldiers is Woodrow Birkhead's expression of disdain for the awards system: "Fair? Not at all. In [sic] April 23, 1951, 6 silver stars were awarded. 1, to a Corporal, and 5 to officers who where [sic] not on the line. Is that fair or anothe[r] representation of how much rear leadership is required[?]"¹⁹⁵ Donald H. Summers described his experience with the award system: "[I] did not receive any medals, until 38 years after discharged and only because of VFW inquiry." Summers demonstrates both bureaucracy at its worst, and the importance veterans attach to medals.¹⁹⁶ Officers, on the other hand, typically described the process as fair. Despite the differences of opinion, all parties seem to agree that medals have an intrinsic value that grows with the passage of time.

The success of MOH publicity countering communist propaganda is also difficult to measure. Recognized as a national symbol of courage and bravery, the MOH easily contrasted images of communists but there were relatively few communists in the U. S. to begin with. As such, this type of publicity seems to have reinforced a preexisting anti-communist trend. The MOH rarely made front-page news, illuminating its relative importance with other contemporary issues. The values symbolized by the MOH, and those reciprocally defined as communist, confirmed for many white Americans what they already knew.

Non-white Americans, particularly African-Americans, benefitted the most from the MOH during the Korean War. Blacks could say that their blood was of equal value to that of whites.

¹⁹⁵ Woodrow Birkhead, KW1419, Questionnaire.

¹⁹⁶ Donald H. Summers, KW927, Questionnaire.

Newspaper articles, movies, and images showed multi-racial units succeeding together. MOH articles describing non-whites usually emphasized the recipient's race first, and then followed the familiar pattern of quoting from their official citation. The Army kept MOH citations fairly standardized, and the press articles often used the same words and phrases, like "gallantry" and "bravery above and beyond the call of duty," to describe soldiers' actions. This made non-white Americans heroes of the same magnitude as whites, which undoubtedly had some affect in the changing racial attitudes in the American public.

In broad terms, publicizing the MOH for specific purposes during the Korean War probably did not achieve the goals the White House and Army desired. There was no immediate connection between the awarding of the MOH and changes in public opinion, nor were soldiers particularly inspired by the exploits described in MOH citations. The sanctity of the MOH morally protected it from overt politicization, while the long bureaucratic procedure required for MOH nomination had the same practical effect. Nevertheless, the Truman administration and the Army used the MOH to the extent that they could. Further research would help to confirm or deny the conclusions of this study. Comparing MOH publicity in World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War would be particularly useful in light of the general public perceptions of each war, both at the time and currently. A comparative analysis with other countries and their military award systems would also illuminate the universal nature of bravery symbols. The importance of the issues raised in this paper is not, however, limited to the distant past. During a 2006 hearing before the House of Representatives Military Personnel Subcommittee, committee members and veterans expressed their concern over the lack of Medals of Honor awarded since the Vietnam War; two in Somalia and one in Iraq. Many were also alarmed that all three were

awarded posthumously. Since the hearing, seven Medals of Honor have been awarded, the most recent to a living recipient – Staff Sergeant Salvatore Giunta.

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Vita

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