

The Korean War: 1950–1953

The Korean War began in 1950 when armies from the north launched an invasion of the south in 1950. The conflict seemed to break out suddenly at the time, but it was actually years in the making.

Background

In the early twentieth century, Japan successfully occupied and then annexed the Korean peninsula. Despite early attempts by Koreans to break away from Japan, Korea remained a colony of the Empire of Japan until the end of World War II. As the Japanese left the peninsula, Soviet forces moved in from the north, and US forces moved in from the south. During this period, the peninsula was split into two zones: one to the north of the 38th parallel, one to the south. When the US and Soviet occupations ended, the country was effectively split in two. The north, following the pattern Soviet forces followed in Eastern Europe, was strongly Communist. The south, being under the influence of the United States, was largely capitalist.

The Start of the War

In June of 1950, forces from North Korea invaded South Korea seeking to unify it under northern leadership. By September, a North Korean victory seemed likely. The United Nations (UN) met and decided to take action to prevent communism from spreading. UN military forces from 15 different countries were sent in to help South Korea.

General MacArthur

The UN troops were led by US General Douglas MacArthur. The troops were able to force the North Koreans back beyond the 38th parallel, and nearly to the Chinese border at the Yalu River. The mountainous terrain and very cold winter weather hindered the UN troops as Chinese forces retaliated, forcing the UN troops back below the 38th parallel.



Conditions

Estimates vary, but by some accounts over five million people (civilians and soldiers) died during the Korean War. There were few naval battles, so most of the war took place on land or in the air. Conditions for those fighting were extreme. In the summer, the Korean peninsula can become extremely hot. In the winter months, however, temperatures could easily fall below zero especially in the northern mountains. The rainy season in between summer and winter dropped lots of rain on the soldiers, making movement difficult through the mountainous terrain. These conditions, combined with food shortages, made the war very difficult for those fighting.

End of the War

In July of 1953, a cease-fire was agreed to, but a formal peace treaty was never signed. The agreement created a "Demilitarized Zone" (DMZ) roughly along the 38th parallel of the country, where the original division existed. The two countries remain split in this way.

Instructions

In this activity, you will learn about the Korean War. As you read and view the associated Media Gallery, take notes and then use the information you have gained to draw conclusions about what environmental factors influenced the outcome of the Korean War.

Analysis

As you read about the Korean War and review the key documents, take notes to inform your conclusions.

Resource/ Document	Information	Observations
Oral History		



The Cold War in Asia Video		
The 1st Battalion of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders		
Map of the Korean War		

Apply and Elaborate

Now, apply what you have learned about the Korean War to draw conclusions about what environmental factors influenced the outcome. Complete the chart below and make sure to provide evidence to support your conclusion from both the text above and the Media Gallery.



Conclusion	Evidence

