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Epilogue

Korea and the American Way of War

By ALLAN R. MILLETT

The past just is not what it used to be. Once we believed that 54,000 Americans died in the Korean War, but we have learned that slippery math and double-counting swelled that death toll by 18,000. Perhaps that should make the war seem less terrible; but Korea still is seen as a loss by many people—including Koreans—because it did not end, like World War II, with

victory parades. When General Mark Clark, USA, signed the armistice on behalf of United Nations Command on July 27, 1953, he remarked that he was the first American soldier to conclude a war without a triumph. The Chinese gloated because Clark said what they wanted to hear, that they had fought the war to a standstill. If Korea is a puzzle, it is because so few people ask the right questions.

First, the conflict had an internal dimension of people's war that could not be eliminated by internationalization. How many researchers investigate the precursor to the events of June

Allan R. Millett is professor of military history at The Ohio State University and coauthor of *A War to be Won: Fighting the Second World War*; he is currently writing a history of the Korean War.

Soldiers advancing
near Inchon.



1950—the pacification, nationbuilding, and counterinsurgency phase of the Korean War from 1945 to 1950? The published accounts of the Korean Military Advisory Group are not very good, and no one reads them anyway, yet advisory efforts and internal war characterized the Cold War and the years

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since. What did we learn about the challenges of creating an effective military institution in a non-Western culture? That is what the Nation did in Korea with a degree of success not obtained elsewhere. Why did the lessons go unlearned?

And what did Korea teach the Armed Forces about conducting joint and coalition warfare? It should have provided lessons galore since by 1953 almost a third (20 of 63) of the infantry battalions in Eighth Army—excluding the South Koreans—were not American units. How did we coordinate artillery fire, close air support, weapons, food,

and training for those battalions? How many people know that the commander of 1st British Commonwealth Division refused to establish a combat outpost line because he knew it would only cause unnecessary casualties? How many know that the legendary Foreign Legion officer, General Ralph Monclar, who went to Korea as a lieutenant colonel, did not lead a French battalion, but spent his time insuring that American corps and division commanders did not squander

French lives? In terms of joint operations, the conduct of the air war—the greatest combat multiplier in the minds of three successive commanders of the Far East Command—requires far more attention, especially in the area of close air support and the birth of helicopter operations.

The Korean War provides relevant and unexplored experiences for all services in virtually every operational area inherent in extended expeditionary warfare. It speaks to combat in a theater with extreme weather, on a battlefield filled with refugees, and confronting enemies unfamiliar in their ferocity and stupidity. Unless the United States either refights the Civil

War of 1861–1865 or falls into a campaign like the British waged in the Falklands, future American wars and near wars will encounter the same sorts of problems.

How many servicemembers, for example, could cope with a civil war in a prisoner of war camp as one group attempts to avoid enemy status while being assaulted by former comrades? And what of atrocities committed by the host nation police or the military manipulation of the native assembly to make a new constitution? How can the Armed Forces work with a range of domestic and foreign civilian agencies? The United Nations? A hostile foreign media covering the war with their adopted First Amendment rights? The Korean War speaks to all these issues.

But the most compelling question is strategic: must limited wars end through negotiations or concessions, or should not war aims, however limited, be gained by unambiguous competence, by the limited war equivalent of unconditional surrender? That question remains unanswered some fifty years after the Korean War. **JFQ**