WARTIME SNAPSHOTS

Commemorating Australian Forces in the Korean War

Between 1950 and 1953 some 18,000 Australians served as part of a multinational United Nations (UN) force in the Korean War during the conflict and after the cease-fire. The image shows two members of the 3rd Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment (3RAR), carrying a wounded soldier from the Republic of Korea (ROK) Army along a snow-covered track towards a medical aid post.

Australian War Memorial P02201.073

REMEMBRANCE DAY 11 NOVEMBER 2013

Background

The war on the Korean peninsula began on 25 June 1950 when North Korea invaded South Korea with the aim of unifying the country under communist rule. Within three days the South Korean capital Seoul was captured. The North Koreans, with the support of the Soviet Union had, however, misjudged the reaction to the invasion and the Korean War became the first occasion in which members of the United Nations (UN) acted collectively to repel the aggression. Personnel from the Australian Army, Royal Australian Navy and Royal Australian Air Force were involved in Korea from July 1950 until 1957 as part of the United Nations Command forces. When 3RAR arrived in Pusan on 28 September 1950, the North Korean advance had been broken and their army was in full retreat following the successful UN amphibious landings at Inchon.

Attached to the 27th British Commonwealth Brigade, 3RAR continued the UN advance north towards the Yalu river on the border between North Korea and the People's Republic of China (PRC). On 28 October a battalion-sized Korean People's Army (KPA) force, with tank and artillery support, were found dug in on wooded hills near Chongju. Eight UN airstrikes over four hours hit enemy positions, before 3RAR launched its attack with support from a company of American Sherman tanks. By dark the Australians had captured the ridges and dug in. The KPA counterattacked soon after dark with tanks, infantry and artillery. 3RAR knocked out three KPA tanks with bazookas and one from a burst of light machine-gun fire that ignited a T-34's external petrol tanks. The situation became so desperate that supporting artillery and mortar fire was called in to fall within metres of the Australian weapon pits. This broke the attack. It was estimated the KPA lost over 150 dead, the Australians lost nine killed and 30 wounded.

On 1 November, the surprise military intervention by the PRC forced the withdrawal of UN and ROK forces from northern Korea. 3RAR and other Australian units fought many more battles as the war gradually settled into a stalemate around the 38th parallel, and it soon became apparent that a negotiated truce was the only solution. After more than two years of negotiations, an agreement was reached and an Armistice signed on 27 July 1953. More than 330 Australians were killed or lost their lives as a result of their service in Korea. The presence of Australians in South Korea continued with a post-Armistice peacekeeping force until 1957. The absence of a signed peace treaty has meant the Korean War has never officially ended.

References

- *Australia in the Korean War 1950-53: Combat Operations,* Robert O'Neill, The Australian War Memorial and The Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1985.

- *Out in the cold – Australia's involvement in the Korean War 1950-1953,* Department of Veterans' Affairs Publication, third edition, 2010.

- *A different sort of war: Australians in Korea 1950-53,* Richard Trembath, Melbourne, Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2005.

Websites

Department of Veterans' Affairs: Australia's involvement in the Korean War

Q1: www.korean-war.commemoration.gov.au/

Q3: www.korean-war.commemoration.gov.au/cold-war-crisis-in-korea/australias-involvement-in-korean-war.php

Q4: www.korean-war.commemoration.gov.au/support-base-in-japan/australian-nurses-in-korea.php

Q5: www.korean-war.commemoration.gov.au/united-nations-counter-offensive/charles-green.php

Q6: www.korean-war.commemoration.gov.au/armed-forces-in-korea/

Q7: www.korean-war.commemoration.gov.au/armed-forces-in-korea/royal-australian-airforce-in-the-korean-war.php
www.korean-war.commemoration.gov.au/stalemate-in-korean-war-1952-1953/migs-versus-meteors.php

Q8: www.korean-war.commemoration.gov.au/china-intervenes-in-korean-war/hmas-murchison-in-the-han-river.php

Australian War Memorial:

Q3: www.awm.gov.au/exhibitions/korea/origins/

Q4: www.awm.gov.au/exhibitions/korea/ausinkorea/medical/

Q5: www.awm.gov.au/exhibitions/korea/faces/green/

Q6: www.awm.gov.au/exhibitions/korea/faces/relations/
www.awm.gov.au/collection/HOBJ4200/

Q7: www.awm.gov.au/exhibitions/korea/ausinkorea/raaf/

Q9: www.awm.gov.au/exhibitions/korea/armistice/

Royal Australian Navy:

Q8: www.navy.gov.au/hmas-murchison

National Capital Authority:

Q9: www.nationalcapital.gov.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=545%3Aanzac-parade-walking-tour-podcast&catid=60%3Alinks-education&Itemid=252&limitstart=4

Teaching Activities

Use the poster, background information and websites listed above, to answer the following questions:

1) Identify the locations discussed in the Background on the Korean War strategic map on the commemorative website.

2) Look at the Remembrance Day Poster: what do you first notice about this image? What people, actions, and objects can you see?

3) What is the United Nations and why did Australia commit its forces to Korea?

4) Over 150 Australian nurses served in Commonwealth hospital units in Japan during the Korean War. Some 50 of those nurses served in units in Korea, during the war. In groups, discuss and answer the following questions:
   a) Describe the importance of their role during the Korean War?
   b) What did non-combat related ailments suggest about the weather conditions in Korea?
   c) What were the advantages of transporting the sick and wounded by air?
   d) What difficulties were faced by transporting the sick and wounded by air?
   e) What were the advantages of having the main base hospital in Japan?

5) Lieutenant Colonel Charles Green was a 30 year old commander of the 3rd Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment during the Korean War. Research this Australian commander and identify what qualities made him an effective and respected leader?

6) 3RAR regularly served alongside military units of the Republic of Korea. Later in the war, some of these South Korean soldiers were embedded within Australian units.
   a) What was the benefit for Australian units?
   b) What was the benefit for South Korean soldiers?

7) How did the introduction of Soviet Mig-15 fighter jets change the way the Royal Australian Air Force operated during the Korean War?

8) Examine the service record of the Royal Australian Navy's HMAS *Murchison* during the Korean War.
   a) What type of vessel was it?
   b) What was its role?
   c) Describe its actions in the Han river on September 28, 1951.

9) Analyse the design features of the Australian National Korean War Memorial on Anzac Parade in Canberra and explain their significance.