WARTIME SNAPSHOTS

The Korean War

A commemorative poster was produced for the 60th anniversary of the commencement of the Korean War. The image shows a Korean War veteran laying a wreath on the Tomb of the Unknown Australian Soldier at the Australian War Memorial. The fractured image is of Private “Bomber” Brown, 3rd Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment (3RAR), wearing a bandage to cover a head wound received from his involvement in the battle on Hill Sardine.

Facts, Figures and Background

The war in Korea began on 25 June 1950 when North Korea invaded South Korea with the aim of unifying the country under communist rule. Within three days they had captured the South Korean capital of Seoul. The North Koreans, with the support of the Soviets had, however, misjudged the reaction to the invasion and the Korean War became the first occasion where members of the United Nations (UN) acted collectively to repel aggression.

Australia’s involvement began in June 1950 with personnel from the Royal Australian Air Force and the Royal Australian Navy committed to United Nations Command forces. The Army’s involvement was announced in July. When the 3rd Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment (3RAR), arrived in Pusan on 28 September, the North Korean advance had been halted and their army was in full retreat. As part of the UN forces, 3RAR continued the push north towards the Yalu river on the border between North Korea and Manchuria. The Chinese, having issued warnings they would not countenance any UN troops crossing the border, entered the fray in late October. Striking with overwhelming force they sent the UN forces into retreat.

One of the major battles involving Australians was the Battle of Kapyong. In April 1951, the Chinese launched their spring offensive with the aim of retaking Seoul. The 27th British Commonwealth Brigade, including 3RAR, was ordered to the valley of the Kapyong River about 60 kilometres north-east of Seoul, where South Korean and New Zealand forces were being driven back. Ordered to halt the attack, the Australians held their positions and stalled the Chinese advance. For their contribution to this action, 3RAR was awarded a US Presidential Unit Citation.

After the Battle of Kapyong, the front became less mobile, eventually stabilising around the 38th parallel. As the war settled into a stalemate it became apparent that a negotiated truce was the only solution. After two years and 17 days of negotiations, an agreement was reached and an Armistice signed on 27 July 1953. A peace conference held in Geneva in April 1954 failed to produce a peace treaty, therefore, technically speaking, the Korean War has never officially ended. The presence of Australians in Korea continued until 1957.

Websites and References

Publications

Teaching Activities

1. Draw up a timeline of events from the commencement of the Korean War in 1950 to the return of Australian troops in 1957.

2. How many nations volunteered to assist Korea under the United Nations flag during the war?
   a) How many nations provided combat troops, equipment and armaments?
   b) Which nations provided non-combat assistance and what type of non-combat assistance did they provide?
   c) What kind of weather conditions did the UN troops experience?

3. What was Australia’s involvement in the Korean War?
   a) explain the role of the Army;
      i) what were the units that were sent?
      ii) which battles were each unit involved in?
   b) explain the role of the RAN;
      i) name the ships that were sent and state what type of vessel they were.
      ii) what were the difficulties experienced by the RAN?
   c) explain the role of the RAAF;
      i) what was their role initially and what did it develop into?
      ii) what humanitarian service did they provide?

4. Research one of the major battles that Australians were involved in. You may wish to research Kapyong, Maryang San or the Hook.

5. Go to the Australians at War Film Archive and search for Margaret Webster, Archive No 2581 and find out about her service or other women who served in the Korean War.

6. Find a map of Korea. On this map locate:
   a) the borders of South Korea, North Korea and Manchuria (China)
   b) 38th parallel
   c) the Kapyong Valley
   d) three major battles fought in South Korea.

7. Did an Armistice occur for the Korean War? Is the war over?

8. Research one of the peacekeeping operations that Australia has been involved in since 1957?