



# CANADA REMEMBERS

## THE KOREAN WAR

### A NEW THREAT TO WORLD PEACE?

The year is 1950. The Second World War is over. The United Nations (UN) has been in place for just five years, and is working to promote global peace and security. Canada is brimming with optimism as Canadians look forward to a prosperous and peaceful second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Suddenly, an international crisis is brewing in the Korean peninsula and people, the world over, are holding their collective breath. What happens next is history.

### SETTING THE STAGE

At the end of the Second World War, Japan's empire was dismantled and the Soviet Union, seeking to gain influence in the region, occupied North Korea while the Americans moved into South Korea. The Soviets and the Americans eventually left, but not until a communist government had been established in the North and a democratic government in the South. Tensions between the two Koreas grew to a climax and, on June 25, 1950, the military forces of North Korea crossed the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel into South Korea. This marked the beginning of hostilities which were to rage on for more than three years, throughout the country known to its people as the *Land of the Morning Calm*.

### REACTION OF THE WEST

The UN, created to resolve conflict between member nations primarily through dialogue and negotiation, also had the flexibility to use force in the pursuit of peace. The situation in Korea would require armed intervention, and 16 member nations, including Canada, would contribute military forces under United States command.

### KOREAN WAR

Initial advances of North Korean troops reached Seoul, the capital of South Korea, but a September 1950 UN sea landing at Seoul's port of Inchon forced the North Koreans to retreat. Seoul was re-captured by UN Forces, which then crossed the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel, moving toward the Chinese border. Chinese forces intervened with a massive offensive that drove the UN and South Korean Armies back across the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel to southern positions along the Imjin River.

In mid-February 1951, units from Canada, Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand and India joined to form one Commonwealth Force, as part of a north-eastern advance toward the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel. Korea, a rugged country with hills, swamps and rice fields, also has periods of severe seasonal weather which hampered combat operations. By the end of March, Canadian troops were in the Kapyong Valley and in mid-April UN Forces were again north of the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel.

Western politicians debated invading China at the risk of expanding the war, but decided against such action and in late April 1951, with new troops and equipment, Chinese and North Korean forces struck in the western and west-central sectors. The aggressive Chinese advance forced US troops in the area to move back or risk being overrun by the enemy. Canadian and other Commonwealth troops entered the battle in the Kapyong Valley and helped the Americans retreat to safety. The Canadians were awarded a US Presidential Citation for this gallant action.

## ARMISTICE

Early in July 1951, ceasefire negotiations began. However, there would be two more years of fighting until the signing of the Armistice at Panmunjom on July 27, 1953. The uneasy truce which followed left Korea a divided country, yet the first UN intervention in history effectively stopped the aggression, and the UN emerged from the crisis with enhanced prestige.

## CANADA'S CONTRIBUTION

As with the two world wars that preceded Korea, Canadians volunteered for military service far from home. More than 26,000 Canadians served in the Korean War, including sailors from eight destroyers and airmen who took part in many combat and transport missions. Canada's military contribution was larger, in proportion to its population, than most other UN participants.

## SACRIFICE

Canada, as a nation, owes an everlasting debt of gratitude to those young men and women who, in the prime of their youth, have served and continue to serve their country to preserve global peace and protect fundamental human rights. Many made the ultimate sacrifice, and lie buried in countries far from their homes and loved ones. Many have returned from service with injuries to body and mind that they must carry with them for the rest of their lives. The names of 516 Canadians who died in service during the conflict are inscribed in the *Korean War Book of Remembrance* located in the Peace Tower in Ottawa.

## LEGACY

The collective experiences and stories of Canada's Veterans provide Canadians with a proud and lasting legacy that will continue into the country's future. Remembering and reflecting on the significance of the contribution they made, and continue to make, strengthens the commitment to preserve the values for which they fought.

The Korean War marked a new stage in Canada's development as a nation. Since the end of the war, Canada has contributed to many military operations around the world in an effort to promote international freedom and maintain world peace.

## CANADA REMEMBERS PROGRAM

The Canada Remembers Program of Veterans Affairs Canada encourages all Canadians to learn about the sacrifices and achievements made by those who have served—and continue to serve—during times of war and peace. As well, it invites Canadians to become involved in remembrance activities that will help preserve their legacy for future generations. To learn more about Canada's role in the Korean War, please visit the Veterans Affairs Canada Web site at [veterans.gc.ca](http://veterans.gc.ca) or call **1-866-522-2122** toll free.

*This publication is available upon request in alternate formats.*

