

## Unit 14

### Korean War – Why was this the Forgotten War?

#### GRADES 6-12

#### HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The Korean War began in June 1950 with the invasion of South Korea by forces from the North Korean People's Army (NKPA) and evolved into a brutal and bloody border war. This war was unofficially considered a military police action. Various United Nations troops, primarily American forces, supported the Republic of Korea's (ROK) forces. The war stalled, restarted, and stalled again, usually over ceasefire and POW discussions, and was only partially resolved with the re-establishment of an artificial border along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. The conflict took a more ominous turn when the Communist Chinese Forces (CCF) joined the fray five months after the start of the North Korean invasion of the South. The war was eventually terminated inconclusively in 1953, when a truce was signed.

#### PROCESS

Students will read letter excerpts from Kennie Rexrode and Bennie Shobe (pages 155-166, I); Bruce Meyer, M.D. and Michael Freed (pages 251-281, 281-286, II).

#### OUTCOMES

Students will gain a better understanding of the difficulties presented by protracted warfare in a hostile environment – from the man in the trenches, to the road crews and medical staff caring for the wounded.

**Assignment:** Read through the three veterans' accounts from Korea:

**A. Sgt. Kennie Rexrode, Seventh Infantry, Third Army Division** (pages 155-163, I)

**B. Sgt. Bennie Shobe, Seventy-sixth Engineer Battalion** (pages 163-166, I)

**C. PFC Michael Freed** (281-286, II)

- Compare and contrast their experiences by answering the following questions
  1. *How differently were they affected by the war depending on when they were in Korea and where they were located?*
  2. *Did their ethnicity and or education determine the type of job they might have?*
- Compare the hardships of Rexrode to those veterans in WWII who were affected by the weather and geography.
- *What does Shobe's account indicate about the typical geographic terrain of Korea?*

**Assignment:** Read excerpts from a physician's letters. Compare and contrast the similarities of his experiences to those in the television M\*A\*S\*H series from the 1970s; also answer the questions that follow.

**D. Lieut. Bruce Meyer, M.D. with the 1<sup>st</sup> MASH Unit**

Read pages 251-281, II. Discuss the background on the Korean Conflict especially using information on page 251. If possible, also use pictures and posters from the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Korean War series (see <http://korea50.army.mil/welcome.shtml>).

- Discussion questions: *Why did 20+ countries send troops and medical units to help South Korea? Truman said that entering the war was the toughest decision he had to make as president. Do you agree or disagree? Why?*
- Divide the class into groups to read different excerpts from Lt. Meyer's letters. Have students look for information about how Meyer became involved in the war, what was his job and the job's of his compatriots, what kind of action does he describe, how did the actual war experience compare to his expectation of war, what will be his good memories and bad memories of the war, and does he express any regrets or wished to have done things differently?
- Video viewing. Have students watch a segment of the TV show M\*A\*S\*H or part of the movie. (Be aware of the movie's rating and preview any scenes that you might use here).

**Culminating Assignment:**

Compare the depiction of the video segment with Meyer's letters. How accurate is the segment to the primary source document of Meyer's letters? Does the video capture the essence of the Korean War? (See also website: <http://korea50.army.mil/index.html>).

**Selected Bibliography:**

Fehrenbach, T. R. *This Kind of War: The Classic Korean War History*. (Brassey's, 1998).

Stokesbury, James L. *A Short History of the Korean War*. (William Morrow, 1988).

Tucker, Spencer C. *Encyclopedia of the Korean War: A Political, Social, and Military History*. (Checkmark Books, 2002.)