

First Casualty of the Korean War

If your understanding of the Korean War comes from watching the TV show *M*A*S*H*, you're not alone. The Korean War has been referred to as the forgotten war. 5 July 2018 marks the 68th anniversary of the first American casualty of the war. With North Korea making headlines again, I've done a bit of research to give you a brief overview of the Korean War. Kenneth Shadrick, an eighteen year old Army soldier from Kentucky has been identified as the first casualty of the war when he was killed by a machine gun of a North Korean tank during the Battle of Osan. Although widely reported as the first casualty, some believe another soldier was killed earlier the same day in the same battle. By all accounts, 5 July 1950 is the date of the first soldier killed in action. Now for the brief history of the war.

At the end of WWII, Korea was divided into zones. The Soviets occupied North Korea as a communist country, and the US occupied South Korea. Both Koreas wanted to be unified but under their own terms. The leader of the North, Kim il Sung, attempted to unify the Koreas by force when on 25 June 1950, he ordered 75,000 soldiers to march over the 38th parallel line into the South. Five days later, President Harry S. Truman ordered US troops into action as America sought to stop the spread of communism.

By August, North Korean troops had taken control of Seoul and controlled much of the country. In September, under General Douglas MacArthur, the US launched a major counter-offensive and drove North Korean troops back to the 38th parallel line and continued across it until troops nearly reached the Korean/Chinese border. The Chinese government fearing a US invasion sent 200,000 soldiers to bolster North Korea.

With the help of China, and some additional support from the Soviets, North Korea pushed US troops back across the 38th parallel again. Fighting was intense. Among significant battles were the Battle of Inchon and the Battle of Chosin. US losses and a disagreement in strategy spurred President Truman to fire General MacArthur. General Matthew B. Ridgway took over command.

Nearly three years after the war started, it ended right where it started, at the 38th parallel line. The US lost 36,500 soldiers. There was no clear winner and no peace treaty established. An armistice was adopted designating a DMZ (Demilitarized Zone) that separated North Korea from South Korea.

Kim il-Sung remained North Korea's leader until his death in 1994 when his son Kim Jong-il took over. After Kim Jong-il's death in 2011, Kim Jong Un, the son of Kim Jong-il and grandson of Kim il-Sung became the leader of North Korea.