

Kilroy is Back: Images of American Soldiers in Korea, 1950-1953

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In the early, dark days of the Korean War an anonymous American GI announced the return of a cultural hero: himself. The fictitious soldier “Kilroy,” whose name had been scrawled on walls across every theater of World War II, reappeared in the deserted, war-torn town of Yechon, South Korea. Soldiers had written “Kilroy was here” during the last war; now, this weary GI scribbled “Kilroy is back.”¹ For a short time, the American fighting man would return to the position of cultural prominence he had attained in 1941-45. The new GI Americans met in popular magazines, photographic exhibits, and newsreels was in many ways a familiar figure. He wore the same uniform and fired the same weapons as he had in World War II. He also shared many of the attributes and miseries of the World War II citizen-soldier, particularly those represented in public imagery during the latter stages of that war. In other, subtler ways, however, the soldier in Korea journalists and others depicted was something of a changed man.²

Early in the Second World War American image-makers had created an idealized soldier for homefront audiences. Journalists Ernie Pyle, Hal Boyle, and Bill Mauldin joined newsreel producers, Hollywood filmmakers, and government propagandists at the Office of War Information (OWI) in celebrating the tough, dependable, patriotic GI.³ Mauldin’s scruffy cartoon characters, Willie and Joe, were famous for their grumbling, but like the soldiers Pyle and Boyle

described, they were reliable and heroic cogs in the democratic war machine.⁴ In her book on American masculinity since the Second World War, Susan Faludi has credited Pyle in particular for forging this “ideal of heroically selfless manhood.”⁵ Yet, in the two years after Pearl Harbor, the media—under pressure from OWI—gave little indication that war could be an ugly business. Blood, casualties, and terror were rare ingredients of war coverage.

After 1943 images of American dead and wounded became more prevalent in the press. Graphic depictions of casualties arrived in homefront living rooms when government propagandists decided that the public had become complacent—and less willing to buy war bonds. Before his wartime death in April 1945, a disillusioned Ernie Pyle had begun to portray the bloodshed of war without sentimentality. In his pocket at the time of his death was a disturbing column on “Dead Men,” so familiar and numerous that he had “almost come to hate them.”⁶

Still, though, late in the war the possibility that soldiers might suffer psychological trauma did not receive the attention from journalists that it did from some psychiatrists. More mundane emotional problems like sorrow and discouragement also remained largely obscured. During the war official censors never released a photograph of an American GI crying.⁷ The wounded were often pictured in popular magazines and advertisements in confident, smiling poses. Early in 1944 a magazine advertisement in *Newsweek* showed a man on a stretcher, a bit bloody (now permissible by government standards), but indefatigable. “Can’t keep a good man down,” the caption read.⁸

The press mounted small challenges to the idealized public image of American servicemen late in World War II, but still portrayed the GI as tough, manly, and confident. More ambiguous notions grew significantly in the brief period between the Second World War and the Korean War. Journalists began giving voice to the simmering frustration of World War II veterans with the housing crisis, cramped GI education, and the prospect of war with the Soviet Union. A few observers noted that some veterans—particularly those who had seen the horrors of combat at close range—were having trouble readjusting to civilian life. *The Best Years of Our Lives* won the academy award for best picture in 1946 for its portrayal of a frustrated disabled veteran. Novelists John Horne Burns (*The Gallery*, 1947) and Norman Mailer (*The Naked and the Dead*, 1948) suggested that American soldiers of World War II could be, at times, vicious, petty, cynical, cowardly, and suspicious of the officers who sent them into battle. According to these authors, the GI valued his own life and often questioned whether it was worth sacrificing himself to the larger cause.⁹ World War II remained “the good war,” but cracks began to emerge in the sentimental imagery of the American soldiers who had fought in it.

Some of those fissures would widen during the Korean War. If reporting during the latter stages of World War II had introduced the struggles and ambiguities of war, journalists covering Korea would take those themes and make them dominant. The horrific conditions reporters found in Korea—and an

early lack of censorship—made it almost inevitable that they would do so. And though many observers later would call Korea “the forgotten war,” several key features of the Korean War GI’s image would resurface repeatedly in American culture of the postwar era.

The “police action” in Korea and images of the American fighting man went through four distinct stages between 1950 and 1953. From June until September of 1950, United Nations forces (mostly American troops) tried futilely to repulse the surprise North Korean attack that had begun on June 25, giving up the South Korean capital of Seoul and retreating to the southeastern port city of Pusan. During the second phase, from September to late November, General Douglas MacArthur led a stunning amphibious landing behind enemy lines at Inchon, and then charged across the 38th parallel nearly to the Chinese border. Third, the introduction of Chinese forces in November led to a long, agonizing retreat during which many thousands of Americans died, until the spring of 1951, when the lines stabilized again along the 38th parallel. The final phase—until the war’s end in the summer of 1953—saw a protracted stalemate and declining support and interest on the American home front.

I

A surprised Harry Truman responded quickly to the crisis in Korea, much to the shock of communist world leaders Joseph Stalin, Mao Tse-tung, and Kim Il-Sung of North Korea. Within days of the North Korean attack, the administration secured a United Nations resolution to “repel the armed attack and to restore international peace” and named Douglas MacArthur UN commander. Truman’s decisive response to events in Korea belied worries over the severe under-preparedness of the American military. The tremendous weaponry and equipment that had been such an integral part of American success in World War II were outdated by the summer of 1950. “The American ground troops in Korea,” wrote the *New Republic* in July, “have been fighting a World War III army with World War II weapons.”¹⁰ In the early stages of the conflict missiles from American bazookas bounced harmlessly off Soviet-made tanks.

The manpower situation was not much better. The United States had ten under-strength combat divisions around the globe, prompting *The Nation* to charge, also in July, that military cutbacks had left the armed forces “so starved of men as to be virtually inoperable.”¹¹ Existing divisions were often hardly ready for war. Eighty thousand troops in Japan, who were to do much of the early fighting in Korea, had been enjoying the spoils of occupation—abundant alcohol, subservient women, cheap labor to do their dirty work. Within days of the North Korean assault, many of these green troops found themselves yanked from the bosom of Japan and thrust into combat on the Korean peninsula.¹² Journalist Marguerite Higgins commented later that most of them had never heard artillery fire before.¹³

Still, more men were needed. A one-year extension of the moribund Selective Service's draft brought thousands of young Americans into the military just weeks after the North Korean attack. By mid-July 18,000 Americans had been sent to Korea; by August that figure would approach 50,000.¹⁴ The draft would deliver 220,000 men to the armed forces by the end of the year.¹⁵ Scores of National Guard units and reservists were called up and sent to Korea, where American troops and matériel constituted the majority of the United Nations force. The United States recalled thousands of World War II officers and noncommissioned officers, soon nicknamed "retreads." Many of these men, in their thirties and forties, were plucked from civilian life and returned to war, while other men their age stood safely beyond the reach of the new draft. The World War II vets lent an air of professionalism to what was then a ragged, untested fighting force.¹⁶ Many deeply resented finding themselves at war again.

Joining the troops in Korea in July 1950 were scores of Western journalists. More than during World War II or Vietnam, the *print* media would deliver news of the war to the American home front. Sandwiched between the heyday of radio and movies in the 1930s and 1940s and the dominance of television in the late 1950s, glossy magazines were king during the Korean War.

In the first six months of the war there was virtually no censorship of the print media. General MacArthur believed that a free press was the hallmark of a democracy. Journalists were asked to "self-censor," or make their own choices about what sort of reporting might jeopardize American security or embarrass the administration. Late in 1950 officials imposed formal censorship, but of the late-World War II variety—images of the dead were permissible, for example. Even with no official control of the news, early in the Korean conflict reporters generally supported the military effort. Gradually, however, journalists came to distrust the official viewpoint and became increasingly skeptical in their reporting, foreshadowing the all-out rivalry between press and brass during the Vietnam War. In her book on combat photography, Susan Moeller has noted, "Korea was clearly the midway point between the 'partner' relationship of the press and the military in World War II and the 'adversary' relationship of the two during the Vietnam War."¹⁷

Western journalists discovered dire circumstances in Korea. Manpower shortages and outdated weapons contributed to the terrible defeats suffered by UN forces in July and August. The North Koreans pushed relentlessly toward Pusan, and American military leaders planned a Dunkirk-like evacuation should the need arise. The first phase of the Korean War—from early July to the eve of General MacArthur's landing at Inchon on September 15—was marked by retreat and misery on the part of the American soldier.

Within the looser bounds of government censorship journalists laid bare the gloom of this early period. A prominent theme was that of *fatigue*, one of several images that circulated and intensified throughout the conflict. Just two weeks into the war media outlets reported that American troops, softened by

time in Japan or fresh from the United States, found the mud and heat of Korea exhausting. "American GI's, battered and dog tired," wrote *Newsweek* on July 17, "slogged south in retreat last week."¹⁸ The same day *Life* ran Carl Mydans's photograph of "exhausted and unshaven American infantrymen [a]sleep on ration boxes and [a] rocky roadside," according to the caption.¹⁹ Two weeks later *Time* reported that as the reinforcement troops of Major General Hobart Gay "moved up to the front, they met the gaunt, bone-tired G.I.'s of the 24th Division, some barefooted, some almost naked, all staggering from exhaustion."²⁰ In August *Newsweek* showed a photo of two sullen artillerymen sitting in the rain, worn out. "War is weary waiting," said the caption.²¹ Newsreel footage that summer frequently showed GIs sleeping.²²

A second theme of the new war was *sorrow*. With hoards of refugees, enormous civilian casualties, Koreans killing Koreans, and ill-prepared American troops, Korea was an exceptionally sad war, and portraits of sorrow quickly joined those of fatigue as stock images. One American unit at Pyongyang, overrun by the North Koreans, tried demolition operations to stall the invaders, but failed for lack of experience with the equipment. Victims of their own poor weaponry and inadequate training, many died at Pyongyang. A lieutenant told *Time* correspondent Frank Gibney that he had to leave behind six wounded GIs, unable to walk. Gibney reported the dialogue between the helpless men and their guilt-ridden officer: "'Lieutenant, what is going to happen to us?' one asked weakly. The lieutenant said, handing them grenades, 'This is the best I can do for you.'"

Robert Miller of the United Press reported the next week that only one in five wounded Americans was removed from a battle south of Chonan. "It was a slaughterhouse," said Lieutenant Junior Childers of California. "Nine men dropped around me and I brought out three."²³ Another soldier reported similar bleakness to Marguerite Higgins, and wanted to know if America was hearing of it:

As his lips trembled with exhaustion and anger, he said, "Are you correspondents telling the people back home the truth? Are you telling them that out of one platoon of twenty men, we have three left? Are you telling them that we have nothing to fight with, and that it is an utterly useless war?"²⁴

In fact, the popular press *was* doing so. The cover of *Newsweek* on August 7 featured the somber headline, "GI's in Korea: They Call it Hell Country"; the same month, John Osborne of *Time* called Korea "The Ugly War."²⁵

Radio listeners heard a chilling first-hand account of American misery in Korea in a broadcast of July 25. The Defense Department program on CBS, "Time for Defense," aired a message from an American infantry officer to his wife. The man, returning from the fallen city of Taejon, spoke for several minutes of battle in Korea:

I don't know where to start on this. These last three weeks have been pretty rough. We're getting help here now. That's something we sure didn't have when we started. What makes it so difficult here is—[pause]—that you can't tell the damn North Koreans from the South Koreans. That caused a lot of slaughter...

The future was not all gloomy, the soldier declared with World War II-era confidence. "There's no question how this will come out. We'll come out on top." But this war—"more than a police action"—was not to be taken lightly: "It's something—gigantic. I know I've been through the Pacific and part of the European campaign, but I never ran into anything like this before." Before and after the man's spoken words was triumphant music—a "rousing march" called "Liberty Land"—totally at odds with the sad tone of his account.²⁶ Often during the Korean War conflicting images would coexist in awkward tension, thanks to the grafting of jaunty cultural conventions onto a new war that was ambiguous and tragic.

As the UN forces and their South Korean allies retreated through the summer of 1950, journalists reported that the outnumbered, outgunned, and bone-tired American GIs were fighting heroically. But this was not the World War II-era heroism based on commitment to a "cause," or the heroism of a triumphant power.²⁷ This new heroic image reflected the bleak odds facing American troops, and reinforced the sense that they were somehow victims of circumstance—and a rugged, unforgiving terrain that was hot and muddy in the summer. Readers of news accounts were invited to marvel at the stoicism of GIs struggling against the elements and the North Koreans, but also to feel sorry for them. *Life* magazine's David Douglas Duncan described his own photographic philosophy in such terms:

I wanted to show something of the agony, the suffering, the terrible confusion, the heroism which is everyday currency among those men who actually pull the triggers of rifles aimed at other men known as "the enemy."²⁸

If the notion that American troops faced hardships and death had circulated during World War II, the idea that they should be pitied for it—or that they themselves suffered agony—seemed new. The *stoicism* of GIs in Korea would become as much a part of their image in American culture as their fatigue and sorrow.

In late August *Time* magazine described an operation that embodied all of these images. Correspondent James Bell covered a Marine assault on No Name Ridge. In his article Bell repeated that designation to dramatic effect, underscoring the bravery of men willing to die for a remote chunk of earth. After hours of relentless pounding by American planes, the Marines stormed

the ridge, but met stiff resistance. The carnage was ghastly, watched all the while by the man who had sent the soldiers into battle, Marine Brigadier General Edward Craig.

The General's hands trembled as he held his binoculars and told Bell, "I never saw men with so much guts." For over an hour the Marines advanced slowly against unyielding fire, until ten men reached the top, only to be killed there. "Finally, the assault force was ordered to withdraw," Bell wrote. "Men too exhausted to cry crawled back down the ridge with no name. For all their terrible sacrifice the ridge was still in enemy hands." Medics brought back a steady stream of the wounded during a lull. General Craig "tried not to look at his torn kids." When a second assault wave went out, the fresh Marines advanced tentatively forward past the wounded coming out. "It was a brutal way to move fresh troops into position. . . . The new wave came up unsmiling, and with not a little fear in their young faces." The second attack finally took the ridge with no name, but, wrote an emotional Bell, "it will never be good to remember those kids being carried out of that valley."²⁹ *Life* printed David Douglas Duncan's photographs of the men crying, devastated officers learning that their ammunition had run out, and wounded men receiving frantic care in the midst of battle.³⁰

Such exposure of despondency drew the ire of some American military leaders. General MacArthur criticized reporters in September 1950 for "laying too great emphasis upon the outcropping of emotional strain such as appeared at the start of the campaign." Yet he continued to believe that censorship was not the answer. Rather, such problems "in due course find their correction, as in Korea, in the maturity gained through experience as the campaign progresses."³¹

The military brass would not rely solely, however, on the presumed "maturity" of the press to counteract the exposure of battle fatigue. As the war progressed, the armed forces would regularly rotate soldiers out of combat for rest and instituted a tour-of-duty system, replacing the World War II policy that kept GIs in the military for the war's duration. Moreover, military officials installed formal censorship in December 1950, and the Public Information Offices (PIOs) in the field also issued their own press releases to counter the downtrodden, exhausted image of the American GI, especially during the dark winter of 1950-51 when Chinese troops were driving UN forces south from the Yalu River.

Meanwhile, Americans were being wounded and killed in great numbers—in the Eighth Army, which represented the bulk of the American forces, there were over five thousand killed and sixteen thousand wounded by the end of the summer (on September 30, 1950, Army combat forces in Korea numbered 103,601 men, while Marine strength was 21,525).³² Coverage of wounded and dead American soldiers continued to be as graphic as it had been at the end of World War II. The first photograph from the war in *Life* magazine showed "An American Casualty," Pfc. Thomas Merante, grimacing in pain after being shot at a South Korean airport.³³ Yet a large photo on the next page featured a grinning pilot demonstrating how he had shot down two North Korean planes, contributing

to the same ambiguity of messages displayed in the radio interview on “Time for Defense” and other coverage of the Korean War.³⁴ Darker were images the next week in *Life*, when several of Carl Mydans’s photos portrayed injured and dead Americans without sentimentality: one wounded GI stands with his arm in a sling and his pants nowhere to be found. The first picture of a dead American—several young soldiers surrounding the body of their lieutenant—also figured prominently in the spread. One of the GIs lights a cigarette as he stares ahead with an expression drained of innocence.³⁵ Pain and death were being shown with a frankness not seen until late in World War II. Now, a war that was going very badly stirred journalists to produce similar images with far greater frequency.

The Signal Corps, which released regular footage for movie theaters under the title “Combat Bulletin,” offered in the first weeks of the war images of wounded and dead American GIs that reflected the general dreariness of the period. In one installment of the series no injured man offered a smile, a cheery thumbs-up, or a wink for the cameras, all fixtures of World War II government films. Rather, several covered their faces, hiding their tears, or lay impassively as plasma was administered on-camera.³⁶ Late in the summer gravely wounded and dead Americans figured prominently in Universal newsreels, which were released in conjunction with the Department of Defense.³⁷ Yet in many of these productions, jaunty music, familiar to viewers of World War II-era newsreels, often clashed sharply with the disturbing images on the screen.

Photographs and words during the summer of 1950 suggested Americans in Korea were tired, miserable, and stoic. It was hard not to commiserate with the soldiers in the pictures, men with bloodshot eyes, crying over the loss of a friend, slumped dejectedly against each other or pitifully wounded—sometimes, captions told readers, about to die.³⁸ At the same time, images of desperation often stood in clumsy contrast with World War II-era cultural conventions ranging from jubilant music to unflinching optimism in media accounts. It was as if producers of these images were disoriented by the way tragedy in Korea challenged what Tom Engelhardt has called the “victory culture” that emerged from World War II.³⁹ Somehow what was happening in Korea did not fit American expectations, and images of GIs reflected that confusion.

Such images of soldiers were pitiable indeed as, late in the summer of 1950, Douglas MacArthur planned a daring attempt to come to their aid. The aging, egotistical general invited photographer Carl Mydans and other American newsmen to join him on the trip from Japan to Inchon. “I’m going on a little operation,” MacArthur told the journalists, “and I’d like to have you boys with me if you’d like to go.”⁴⁰

II

By September 1950, Congress and the Selective Service had bolstered American military strength considerably. The Americans nearly doubled their

strength in Korea, to about 85,000 men; similar increases boosted Republic of Korea (ROK) forces, bringing total United Nations strength (including troops from several other UN countries) to 180,000 soldiers on September 1.⁴¹ On September 15, 1950, UN forces landed to the west of Seoul at Inchon, one of the most daring and controversial operations of modern military history. UN troops seized Inchon, recaptured Seoul, and broke out of the Pusan Perimeter in the south, setting up a great vise around the North Korean army. By early October UN forces had driven the North Koreans back to the 38th parallel. Intent on destroying North Korea's military and unifying the country, MacArthur received authorization to cross the parallel on October 9 and pushed nearly to the Chinese border—the Yalu River—by late November.⁴²

Whether because the period of UN resurgence was so brief, or because the war itself was still so bloody, the media repeated many images of the American GI in the second phase of the war. Still prominent were depictions of GIs fatigued, wounded, or demoralized. Not surprisingly, however, the briefly triumphant American soldier now appeared, occasionally, with a bit more swagger in his step.

One of the first images to reach American shores after the UN counter-offensive was *Newsweek's* cover of October 9. The photograph captured the iconographic confusion of Korea: bombast from World War II clashed awkwardly with a (seemingly) nastier war. A young American GI guards a frightened enemy soldier, whose lofted arms and dazed look signal his helplessness. The caption proclaims, somewhat defensively, "U.S. Fighting Man: Winner—and Still Champ." Yet the picture inspires little confidence in the American GI. His helmet tilted sloppily to one side, his appearance generally unkempt, the youthful soldier holds his pistol out toward the prisoner with a wild, inexperienced look in his eye. That expression, familiar to any reader of popular magazines through the summer of 1950, spelled battle nerves. Readers would have been hard-pressed to determine which of the two men in the photo looked more scared.⁴³

Similar ambiguity marked other materials in the iconography of the war's second phase. The initial "Combat Bulletin" from the Signal Corps after Inchon featured the familiar chipper music, but the narrator did grant that fighting had reached a "peak of fury."⁴⁴ The capture of Seoul figured heavily in another Signal Corps film, but victory did not sanitize the images of war; still widespread was footage of prisoners, the wounded, and battle.⁴⁵ Again, these images were accompanied by upbeat music and smiling troops. Coverage in the popular press also reflected a new optimism. "By sea, land, and air," wrote *Newsweek* on October 16, "the United Nations host this week moved in for the kill in Northern Korea." The magazine reported that 250,000 Americans and 100,000 South Koreans were smashing their way into the communist north. Pictures of cheering American GIs graced the pages of the article.⁴⁶

At the same time, in October *Newsweek* printed a photo of a GI crying over the loss of his friend, the "price of victory," according to the caption.⁴⁷ (Figure 1) The picture fit into a long line of images, begun early in the war, that never



Figure 1: This Department of Defense image became *Newsweek*'s "Price of Victory" photograph in its issue of October 9, 1950. Courtesy National Archives, photo no. 111-SC-347803.

shied away from the sorrow of American GIs in Korea. According to one letter to the editor, the picture should join "Marines on Iwo Jima" in the pantheon of celebrated war photos.⁴⁸ The two pictures, reprinted side by side on *Newsweek*'s letters page, offered an unmistakable illustration of the transition in popular iconography from World War II to Korea.⁴⁹

Part of the impetus for persistently somber images in the period of UN revitalization was the discovery of North Korean atrocities. A Signal Corps film in the fall reported that on October 6, 1950 the North Koreans had massacred scores of South Koreans and some American prisoners. Footage of grotesque, misshapen bodies—"evidence for a war crimes investigation," according to the narrator—drifted across the screen in nauseating close-ups.⁵⁰ Popular periodicals carried similar news of communist treachery in October. *Time* showed a picture of hundreds of South Koreans killed during the communist evacuation of Taejon, and captioned it "Korea's Buchenwald," referring to the Nazi concentration camp.⁵¹ The *New York Times* reported another atrocity: "Chinese Communist

hordes, attacking on horse and on foot to the sound of bugle calls, cut up Americans and South Koreans at Unsan today in an Indian-style massacre that may prove to be the costliest of the Korean War.”⁵² The strident anticommunism circulating in American society certainly informed such coverage. *Newsweek* printed graphic shots of slaughtered South Koreans under the headline, “This is Communism: How the Reds Behaved While Winning.”⁵³

Though the press did not report any atrocities committed by American troops in Korea, there were visual hints that mistreatment of prisoners did take place. Pictures in *Newsweek* in October showed two captured communist nurses, stripped down and wrapped in white cloth, surrounded by angry-looking American soldiers; an accompanying photo depicted “Red POW’s cowering in a ditch,” according to the caption.⁵⁴ During the period of North Korean retreat, American media commonly printed photographs of terrified enemy soldiers under the watch of spiteful Americans. Despite frequent, strong declarations in the media that only the communists committed atrocities, such images invited some degree of suspicion. Indeed, a month later two letters to the editor from American women objected to the poor treatment of prisoners that *Newsweek*’s photos implied. “After all,” wrote a college student, “two wrongs don’t make a right.” More forceful was the letter from Helen MacDonald, a nurse from Massachusetts:

We as Americans criticize the way the Reds treat the American prisoners of war. Some of the pictures the newspapers and magazines print concerning the Red prisoners of war at the mercy of our own soldiers are absolutely disgraceful and shameful. . . . The picture of the two Red Korean nurses partially disrobed at the mercy of four “men” . . . makes me thoroughly ashamed of our forces in their treatment of POW’s.⁵⁵

This opinion was surely not typical of American magazine readers, but it did suggest that American GIs might act dishonorably in the field.

III

As early as October 3, just days before UN forces crossed the 38th parallel, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai had warned that if *American* troops crossed that frontier, his nation would intervene on behalf of the North Koreans. China followed through, and by mid-December, the Chinese and North Koreans had driven UN forces back to the 38th parallel. Along the way, fierce fighting in the vicinity of the Chosin Reservoir—the “Frozen Chosin,” in GI parlance—claimed thousands of lives on both sides. By early 1951 the Chinese had pushed below the 38th parallel, and fighting around that border would persist until the lines stabilized in the spring. Meanwhile, in early April President Truman fired MacArthur after a series of insubordinate acts by the General.⁵⁶

With UN forces again in retreat, journalists repeated a practice from the early, dark days of the war: the grafting of World War II-era cultural standards onto the Korean conflict. A Universal newsreel in mid-December painted an ambiguous picture of the UN evacuation from North Korea. To a background of martial music, the narrator described the bedraggled, miserable American GIs shown in retreat:

This is the bitter fate of the Allied armies. . . . In the subzero weather they [American Marines] make camp, awaiting assurance of evacuation, knowing they will not be abandoned to a relentless foe. Rations and water are scarce, but these hard-bitten troops, facing a Korean Dunkirk, never lose faith in their own ability, and that of their air and sea comrades to keep fighting when the situation is blackest. . . . This is the pack-up for the beginning of evacuation, and the hope of survival.

There was no shortage of grim language in the newsreel: the narrator spoke of the “badly shattered men” who had been wounded fighting “heroically, side by side, in this grim business,” and men “frost-bitten beyond belief.” Yet footage of smiling troops accompanied many of these passages. The ambiguity reached a climax at the end of the report: “Facing all the terror, the misery, of evacuation and actual death, they can still laugh it off.”⁵⁷

In similar fashion, a “Combat Bulletin” from the Signal Corps found reason for hope at the “Frozen Chosin”: the resilience and bravery of the Americans fighting there, even in retreat. The short film began with a quote from General Oliver Smith, First Marine Division: “We’re not retreating, we’re just advancing in a different direction.” Other language from the narrator gave indications of the misery in Korea but always with that signature, hopeful twist. American troops were “tired, cold, and weary . . . but they know they will fight their way out of the trap.” Drawing from a popular image of the military during World War II, the narrator lauded the teamwork of American forces at the Chosin Reservoir:

No matter how cold and tired they may feel on the ground, the sight of these cargo planes, dropping their parachute loads from the skies, gives the men a sense of not being forgotten, a feeling that they are still part of a vast team, fighting together.⁵⁸

Clashing with this optimistic tone were on-screen images: wounded men being evacuated by air; Americans burning their own equipment to prevent it from falling into Chinese hands; disheveled troops eating Thanksgiving dinner in their foxholes. Though his tone was chipper, the narrator did say, “General winter is allied with the Chinese in this operation,” and spoke of “these desperately

tired men inch[ing] their way along.” Indeed, the film seemed to emphasize the resilient and confident spirit of UN forces precisely because some men *did* feel forgotten or hopeless—a mood that the film itself confirms. As it turned out, the notion that GIs were forgotten by the home front would eventually become one of the primary themes of the Korean War.

It was doubtful that many American GIs were “laughing off” their miseries in Korea, as the Universal narrator had suggested on December 14. Indeed, the well-reported tribulations of the American GI in Korea at the end of 1950 made him a broadly sympathetic figure as 1951 began. In mid-January *Newsweek* put on its cover a sole American GI, his head down, carrying a heavy load. (Figure 2) The caption read, “GI in Korea: Again the Road Back,” in reference to the second major UN retreat in six months.⁵⁹ In the same period *Time* magazine named the GI in Korea “Man of the Year.” On the cover, a determined soldier in a bleak landscape appeared above the caption, “Name: American. Occupation: Fighting Man.” (Figure 3) The accompanying article painted a dark picture of the GI’s situation in Korea—and made him seem the victim of myriad forces outside his control.⁶⁰

American political leaders, according to *Time*, had let down the GI— “[Secretary of State] Dean Acheson and his fellow diplomats of the free world had, in 1950, notably failed to stop the march of communism,” and the government “had not given him weapons as numerous or as good as he needed and had a right to expect.” Military leadership had also failed: “the best commander of the year, MacArthur, had blundered and been beaten.” That left the American fighting man as the year’s real, if somewhat tragic, hero. Though some of these men had fought in Europe and Asia during World War II, *Time* suggested that Korea was somehow *different*:

Most of the men in U.S. uniform around the world had enlisted voluntarily, but few had taken to themselves the old, proud label of “regular,” few had thought they would fight, and fewer still had foreseen the incredibly dirty and desperate war that waited for them.

The article included close-ups of almost twenty American soldiers, striving to argue that individuality did not mean an abandonment of teamwork, the great achievement of World War II. “[The American GI] fights as he lives, a part of a vast, complicated machine—but a thinking, deciding part, not an inert cog.” *Time* admitted that these qualities “seem to be contradictory.” Once again, journalists of the early 1950s grappled with the clash between memories of World War II and the realities of defeat and retreat in Korea.⁶¹

With gloomy images swirling in the winter of 1950-51, some military leaders countered with their own versions of the war. In January Lt. Gen. Robert L. Eichelberger, former commander of the Eighth Army, complained in *Newsweek*



Figure 2: *Newsweek* used this Department of Defense photograph as its cover on January 15, 1951, above the words, “GI in Korea: Again the Road Back.” Courtesy National Archives, photo no. 342-FH-4A-37885-78460AC.

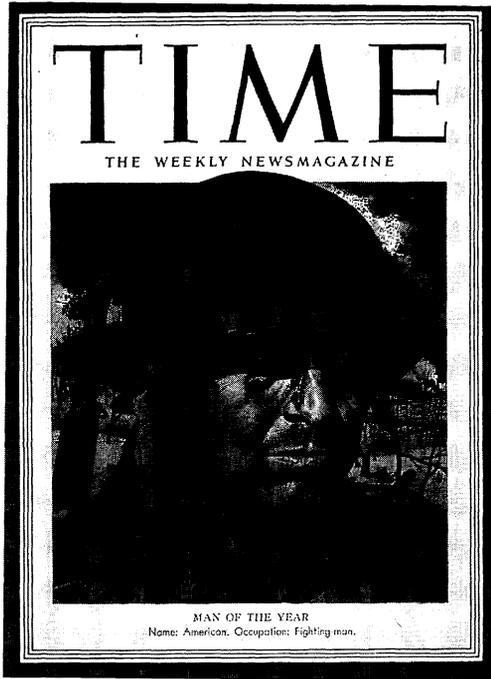


Figure 3: *Time* magazine's cover of January 1, 1951. Time Life Pictures/Getty Images.

of the media's hasty reports of "tears" and "battle fatigue" among American soldiers. "Our lads have performed miracles in Korea," read an Eichelberger quote beneath a picture of shivering, but smiling, GIs.⁶² In the same period the Signal Corps' "Combat Bulletin" film series seemed to respond directly to notions in the news media that American forces were plagued by fatigue, low morale, disorganization, and lack of confidence in their officers:

Throughout Korea during the first week of February [1951], observers are noticing more and more the *high morale* evidenced by the UN soldiers. With *assured faith in their leaders*, and *confidence* in their own ability as a *fighting team*, the troops of fourteen nations forge ahead with the push northward toward the Han River and Seoul.

Reviving many of the positive images of the World War II years, the film sounded almost desperate to reassure viewers that teamwork and high morale would win in Korea. Meanwhile, however, the film's images of a crying American soldier, heavy combat, casualties, exhausted GIs, and UN forces repulsed by the Chinese

at Hill 584 contradicted the narrator's confidence. Even the fatigue of soldiers, by now a stock image of the Korean War, received perhaps its most sanguine treatment to date: "Realizing the dangers of over-fatigue, these hardened soldiers have learned to take advantage of every opportunity to rest. Now, well accustomed to the strenuous conditions of battle, the men group together in a well-earned sleep."⁶³ Invoking a notion of the World War II era, this Signal Corps production indicated that soldiers became hardened, not weakened, by combat.⁶⁴

Other imagery suggested deeper problems. In the first six months of 1951 popular magazines reported war's psychological impact with a vividness exceeding almost all treatments of the subject during World War II. Then, most observers had described becoming a soldier as a process that hardened the spirit. Now, in Korea, journalists increasingly were finding a change toward mental breakdown. *Newsweek's* editors, in their issue of March 19, 1951, expressed this idea bluntly. On the left side of the page a smiling soldier stood above the caption, "Before battle: A jaunty Marine grins." On the right, another picture showed a GI, dejected and exhausted, leaning on his rifle. He covered his eyes, either trying to sleep (standing up), or hiding his tears. The caption read, "After battle: A weary Marine rests."⁶⁵ Nowhere was the downward spiral of the human spirit under battle so visually explicit as in this before-and-after feature.

In June a *Saturday Evening Post* story presented a similar version of combat's effect on its participants. Lieutenant Colonel Melvin Russell Blair's "I Send Your Son Into Battle" took readers inside the decision-making processes of officers in Korea. It also contained blunt images of men under the strain of combat. The first photograph showed an "exhausted" GI staggering away from a skirmish, helped through the pouring rain by two comrades, above the caption, "A short time ago he was a boy in T shirt and blue jeans." These words suggested a transformation of sons from naïve youngsters to shocked and perhaps broken men. A similar image followed on the next page—a soldier sitting down with his head in his hands in a posture of grief. "The reaction after the battle," read the caption. "The young soldier lived through it, and is shocked."⁶⁶ Late in World War II similar images of battle-fatigued soldiers had crept into popular media coverage; one example was the publication in *Life* magazine of Tom Lea's famous painting of a GI gazing hollowly into space, later known as the "thousand yard stare." But now, such images were a mainstay of Korean War coverage. The exception had become the rule.

IV

The title of a Signal Corps "Combat Bulletin" film summed up the fourth and final phase of the war: "Stalemate in Korea."⁶⁷ For two years—from July 1951 to July 1953—the UN and the communists fought a desultory war along the 38th parallel while diplomats negotiated at Panmunjom. Occasional military forays kept medics on both sides busy as the two foes sought to strengthen their

bargaining positions. Finally, on the morning of July 27, generals from both sides entered a special building constructed for the truce. Without uttering a word of greeting, and with artillery fire audible in the distance, the men signed several copies of the armistice agreement. It took just twelve minutes to halt the hostilities that had killed or wounded nearly four million people over three years.⁶⁸

In the spring of 1951, as the Korean War was settling into a stalemate, photographer Edward Steichen unveiled his third war-related exhibit in a decade at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York. Joining his efforts from 1942 (*Road to Victory*) and 1945 (*Power in the Pacific*) was a new show, *Faces of Korea* (alternately called *Korea—The Impact of War*). The photographic exhibit embodied every one of the images already surrounding Korean War soldiers: fatigue, misery, stoicism, and physical agony. Close-ups of the faces of GIs gave the show its name. The replication of images in the media was no coincidence; many of the pictures were the work of Carl Mydans and David Douglas Duncan of *Life* magazine, while others represented the efforts of Navy, Signal Corps, and Air Force photographers.⁶⁹ After running at MoMA from February to April, *Faces of Korea* toured the country in the summer.⁷⁰ Meanwhile, Duncan, a former Marine, published many of the same images in his book of 1951, *This is War!*, which was released a year after the North Korean invasion. Some of the Duncan photos also had run in *Life* magazine's issue of September 18, 1950.

An enormous proportion of Duncan's pictures showed American soldiers in states of despondency. The working titles of photographs in *Faces of Korea* suggested the emphasis on misery:

Senselessness and Brutality; Badley [*sic*] wounded medic shot and left for dead; Exhausted American soldier on the Taegu front; Two wounded men with clasped hands; Army medical officer collapses at death of one of his staff wounded in action; Eyes of Marine; Crying jeep driver; Three men looking at their dead friends; The Living walk—the dead ride; Hands of corpse coming through snow.⁷¹

Scores of other photographs captured similar scenes of death and destruction. Steichen showed little of the lighter side of war so often included in World War II iconography, including his own exhibitions of 1942 and 1945. Sadness dominated; in *This is War!* and in *Faces of Korea*, whole sections were devoted to close-ups of men crying. Two such sequences were especially heartbreaking.

Just after the landing at Inchon a jeep carrying several wounded American GIs hit a landmine. "Parts of machine and men were blasted over a wide area," Duncan's caption in *Faces of Korea* read, "one Marine killed, and three others terribly wounded." The words continued:

The driver was among the wounded, and was crying heart-brokenly—not because of his wounds but because the dead Marine had been his buddy, and now he felt responsible for the other man’s death. Of course, it wasn’t his fault, yet the driver’s sorrow over the tragedy reflects something of the Marine’s magnificent spirit—it is the interdependence of men, men who place unquestioning faith in the man in the adjoining foxhole.⁷²

Photos of the crying driver and another man with tears streaking his face followed a picture of the wrecked jeep and the American corpse. The sequence ended (in both the book and the photo exhibit) with a shot of the wounded men departing in another jeep. One man’s face still shows his tears, and all the soldiers look pensive. “Wounded and broken,” wrote Duncan in *This is War!*, “each lost in his thoughts, each still alive, that isolated group of men represented all other men, perhaps civilization itself.”⁷³ Just as in other Korean War iconography, the impact of war on the mental state of individuals was prominent.

The second story offered a rare glimpse of how GIs in the field reacted to seeing themselves in the media. A photo of a soldier crying had appeared in the issue of *Life* back in September 1950, part of Duncan’s spread depicting the battle for No Name Ridge. Corporal Leonard Hayworth had descended from the ridge, where all but two of his squad had perished, and broke into tears of frustration and anger before Duncan’s camera.⁷⁴ A few weeks after the picture ran in *Life* magazine Hayworth’s buddies discovered it and showed it to him. Duncan, who was present, described the scene in *This is War!* several months later: “Corporal Leonard Hayworth had been first embarrassed, then good-naturedly shy when shown his pictures made earlier in the month down along the Naktong River. Surrounded by his buddies—it was nearly dark—he said nothing.” Not everyone present kept silent. “Lousy goddamned picture. Hell! We all cry sometime,” an older soldier exclaimed.⁷⁵ Clearly he was not pleased that American image-makers were showing such scenes.

Perhaps compounding the offense (at least for that grizzled Marine), Duncan snapped a picture of Hayworth looking at himself in *Life*. Now, in *Faces of Korea*, audiences saw *that* photo. If the initial shot of Hayworth crying was heartrending, this one surpassed it for a different reason. The caption told viewers that the morning after seeing his picture, Hayworth had died in a hail of enemy bullets.⁷⁶

Faces of Korea and *This is War!* elicited strong reactions from reviewers and audiences. Charles Simmons of the *New York Times* understood Duncan’s innovations: “Duncan has done for Korea what none of the hundreds of men with cameras achieved in World War II.”⁷⁷ Reviewers appreciated the stark portrayal of human suffering and the new focus on the *individual* GI in Duncan’s book. Critic Orville Prescott of the *New York Times* wrote, “What it means for the individual American soldiers who are fighting and dying there for the rest of

us is vividly revealed in these terrible and beautiful photographs.”⁷⁸ Other publications offered similar comments. In Charlottesville, Virginia a university paper wrote that viewers of the exhibit “will undoubtedly renew Sherman’s conviction that ‘war is hell,’” and praised the show’s revelation that war was a “terror to soldiers and civilians alike.” The *Miami Herald* hoped that if *Faces of Korea* would not actually stamp out war, it would at least take “the first feeble step in that direction.” A reporter in Woodstock, Vermont appreciated the “reflection of these events [combat] in the faces of the participants.”⁷⁹

Yet Steichen himself believed that viewers of his exhibition were missing the point—or at least forgetting it. He claimed that the purpose of *Faces of Korea* was to incite a hatred for war, which he called a “horrible monstrosity” and a “butcher shop.” As he put it in a press release, Steichen wanted to shock people out of complacency:

Human nobility, compassion, devotion, inexhaustible endurance, senselessness and brutality are scrambled together under the impact of war. Here photography, *bridging remoteness and apathy*, dumps a place and a moment called, “Korea” right into our laps. . . . Here are photographs with something important to say and they say it.⁸⁰

The images in the MoMA exhibit shocked many, but Steichen thought such revulsion was short-lived. People would report to him the deep impression the photos had left, but then “go out and have some drinks,” in Steichen’s words.⁸¹ A publicity report for the show hinted at this problem when it quoted a viewer in Miami, who reacted to the grim photos by exclaiming, “And WE complain about the heat. I’m ashamed.”⁸² It seemed, at least to Steichen, that Americans were already forgetting the suffering in Korea, and there was little his pictures could do about it. “I had failed to accomplish my mission,” he wrote a decade later. “They [visitors] left the exhibition and promptly forgot it.”⁸³

True to Steichen’s impression, during 1951 the GI in Korea would begin to fade from the American imagination. Bill Mauldin, the famed cartoonist of World War II, had this to say in 1952 about the fate of the American GI in Korea:

He fights a battle in which his best friends get killed and if an account of the action gets printed at all in his home town paper, it appears on page 17 under a Lux ad. There won’t be a victory parade for his return because he’ll come home quietly and alone, on rotation, and there’s no victory in the old-fashioned sense, anyway, because this isn’t that kind of war. It’s a slow, grinding, lonely, bitched-up war. . . .⁸⁴

Indeed, as the war reached a standstill, coverage of American troops by the news media declined. In February 1952 *Time* magazine stopped running its

weekly “War in Asia” feature, a fixture of the magazine since July 1950. Senator Harry Cain of Washington, a vigorous critic of Korean War policy, told interviewers on television late in 1951, “In the last three or four months, one has generally found it necessary to refer to the middle sections of our American press to determine our American losses.”⁸⁵ On the whole, Cain charged, the media was much more diligent in reporting enemy body counts.

Some observers in late 1951 came to believe that the American public was failing to support the troops in Korea. The same television interviewer asked Senator Cain in October 1951 whether the country was “keeping faith” with the American soldiers “fighting hand-to-hand battles on the heartbreak ridges.” Cain answered with obvious emotion:

I must speak very personally in answer to that question, as an American. I feel that we have not begun, at home, politically, and among our people, to make contributions, and to give the kind of support which justifies the blood which young Americans are shedding so willingly in Korea. To me, it’s the tragedy of my lifetime, sir.⁸⁶

Cain and other conservatives were highly critical of Truman’s limited war in Korea, some (including Cain) calling for use of the atomic bomb. Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin also leveled such criticisms at the administration as part of his wider assault on liberals and members of the State Department, few of whom opposed communists stridently enough for the Senator’s taste. On the same television program that Cain visited, McCarthy couched his disapproval of war policy in terms of its abandonment of the men fighting in Korea:

I assume that many American mothers who have lost sons will now wonder why we didn’t follow General Douglas MacArthur’s sensible theory of hitting back. As you know, [Dean] Acheson’s argument . . . was that if we hit back, if we tried to win that war, we might make the Chinese communists mad. Now, why we should worry about making someone mad who is blowing the heads off our boys I don’t know.⁸⁷

How could our soldiers win, critics claimed, with one hand tied behind their backs?

One of the most outspoken champions of the American soldier in Korea was the novelist James Michener. In a well-known article of May 1952, “The Forgotten Heroes of Korea,” he touted the courage of Americans in Korea as he rebuked the public for its short memory: “We forget,” he wrote in the *Saturday Evening Post*, “Even those of us who know better forget that today, in the barren wastes of Korea, American men are dying with a heroism never surpassed in our history. Because they are so few, we forget that they contribute so much.”⁸⁸

Forty years later Michener's views on Korea had not budged. He wrote in his memoirs that during the war, "we assured the general public: 'Don't inconvenience yourself. Don't even pause in whatever you're doing. Make a bundle. There's no war.'"⁸⁹

Central to Michener's account in 1952 was a group of naval pilots whose work, he felt, was no more important than anyone else's in Korea but who merited attention for the "absolute kind of courage" their effort required.⁹⁰ In the summer of 1950 journalists often linked the courage of Americans in Korea to their dire military situation and the miserable terrain of the country. By 1952, in Michener's telling, American fliers in Korea were heroic not just for their aerial exploits, but also because they labored and risked their lives without the support of the home front. The resulting humility of the pilots made them seem all the more laudable. Michener drew the comparison with World War II directly, speaking of the naval pilots:

I hold their heroism to be greater than what I witnessed in 1941-45, for then the soldier on Guadalcanal could feel that his entire nation was behind him, dedicated to the job to which he was dedicated. Civilian and soldier alike bore the burden.

Now, in Michener's rendering, the men in Korea "seem to fight in a vacuum, as if America didn't care a damn." Here Michener painted the American serviceman as a sort of lone hero, wholly different from the team player of World War II mythology. His image dovetailed with portraits of the GI as tired, sad, and stoic that had prevailed since the first Americans set foot in Korea. Now the sense that these soldiers were isolated and forgotten joined that image. "When the men of Marsh Beebe's squadrons go forth to hold the enemy," wrote Michener, "they are, I am ashamed to say, alone."⁹¹

Michener also felt the need to restore respect for military leaders. His article lacked any indication that officers bungled or lacked compassion for their men. "In case I haven't made the point clear," Michener wrote, "Admiral Perry and Marsh Beebe keep a close watch on their men." John Perry was the "epitome of the historic crusty, taciturn Navy man," an ornery character who was "a holy terror to inefficiency, and one of our greatest living air admirals." Beebe, who led a squadron of fliers, was "rugged, tough and willing," could apparently fly any plane, and had, in Korea and the last war, destroyed more than his share of enemy aircraft. His men—pilots below him in the pecking order—called him the "Greatest of the follow-me boys." Airmen would stick with Beebe in all sorts of perilous situations. For his part, Beebe minded his pilots like sons. It was said aboard the aircraft carrier, "He flies every inch of the way with us. He makes every landing. This guy dies in every crash."⁹²

Michener's work with naval pilots would eventually result in his novella *The Bridges at Toko-Ri*, a major work of the Korean War published in 1953 both as a book and in its entirety in *Life* magazine (it also was made into a

Hollywood film in 1955). Like the *Post* article, the novella suggested that soldiers, not war, deserved celebration. “All wars are stupid,” growled a salty admiral, perhaps modeled after John Perry. “But we’d better learn to handle the stupidity.”⁹³ In 1952, though, Michener used the pages of the *Saturday Evening Post* to drum up support for the men slogging through the Korean War. The author hoped that Americans would adopt the habit of naval pilots, who greeted every returning flier with the greeting, “Welcome Home, Hero.”⁹⁴

As the two sides signed the armistice of July 1953, little land had changed hands. To most Americans, the war seemed a colossal waste of time, money, and especially lives. Through three years of fighting, more than two million civilians suffered death or injury as four armies churned over the landscape. The South Korean military suffered casualties (dead and wounded) numbering some 270,000, while the Chinese and North Koreans bore over 1.5 million. The United States suffered 54,000 dead and more than 100,000 wounded.⁹⁵ Five million Americans served on active duty during the Korean War, almost a third of the figure for World War II.⁹⁶

V

The brief but bloody war in Korea produced a series of images that in many ways were an extension of those seen in the waning months of World War II. Toward the end of that war journalists had begun to reveal the agonies and ambiguities of combat to audiences that had previously seen lots of smiling soldiers and little of the dead and wounded. Also in 1944-45, image-makers in the press had started suggesting, in limited fashion, that warfare might psychologically damage GIs. If the media during World War II had *hinted* that Kilroy might be sad, stoic, fatigued, and shocked, reporters in Korea made those themes central to their dispatches. In that way, journalists in Korea reproduced—but also amplified—images originating near the end of World War II.

Although media coverage of the Second World War had hinted at the deleterious effects of warfare on the individual soldier, the overwhelming majority of images in that war told a more positive story: Soldiering was good for teaching responsibility, sacrifice, and teamwork. Government propagandists as well as journalists, though they showed more dead and wounded after 1943, continued to describe soldiers with unflagging toughness, bravery, and confidence. This was the stoic citizen-soldier, the masculine hero, of World War II mythology. He did not shed tears—no GI was ever shown crying during the Second World War—and he did not shy away from a challenge. Kilroy was part of a vast, democratic effort and proud of it.

Journalists in Korea painted a more complicated picture of the American GI. By more fully allowing their subjects to exhibit discouragement, sorrow, agony, and fear, these image-makers widened the definition of the masculine, American fighter. When reporters showed a GI in Korea crying, they did so without questioning his toughness, making sensitivity seem an acceptable and

even desirable male attribute. They helped expand the terms of manliness for the most visible, traditionally masculine members of American society—combat soldiers. No longer a cultural hero just because of his contribution to a worthy team effort, now the American GI was valorized in the media for his suffering as well. Kilroy was always a figment of the imagination, both when he “was here” during World War II and when he returned to fight in Korea in 1950. Yet the anguished Kilroy appearing in media coverage of the Korean War more closely resembled the GI he was meant to represent than had his predecessor of the Second World War.

For his suffering, the serviceman in Korea sometimes seemed the victim of American foreign policy and the military leaders that had landed him in combat. First he was pulled from occupation duty in Japan, or civilian life in the United States, or a well-deserved rest after service in World War II. Then, as the media reported, he was thrust ill-equipped and ill-trained into battle in an unforgiving climate. As the training and weaponry improved, the Chinese entered the war, despite public assurances from the military brass that they would not. Finally, the GI continued to fight even as the American public forgot about him. The soldier in Korea, then, was heroic precisely because he struggled against such long odds and miserable conditions, and later in the war, because he fought against a backdrop of apathy in the United States. Such imagery both reflected and shaped the cynicism some Americans felt about the ability of their leaders to manage the armed forces and foreign policy, long before the war in Vietnam would make cynicism a household word.

Many Americans have referred to Korea as “the forgotten war,” yet some images of GIs in that conflict resurfaced later in the twentieth century. In three areas of American public culture—war films, war coverage, and war memorials—imagery from the Korean conflict cast a long shadow. Whether subsequent filmmakers, journalists, and memorial architects realized it or not, they often revived imagery of American soldiers circulated during the war in Korea.

Beginning during the conflict itself, Hollywood producers released several films about the Korean War that borrowed heavily from media coverage, including *The Steel Helmet* (1951), *Men in War* (1957), and *Pork Chop Hill* (1959). All three featured cynical, hardened soldiers as well as scared, tearful, and disoriented draftees. *The Steel Helmet* and *Men in War* made the GIs seem isolated from (and resentful toward) the larger military structure that had landed them in Korea, while in *Pork Chop Hill*, the brass is present but often inept and uncaring about its foot soldiers. The military leadership in the film orders a costly drive to take Pork Chop Hill from the communists in order to save face at the negotiations in Panmunjom. Heroism in these Korean War movies is complex, as central characters occasionally kill civilians, fight bitterly among themselves, and ignore orders from officers. Some accounts of World War II, as well—including the film *Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949), James Jones’s novel *The Thin Red Line* (1962), and the television series *Combat* of the early 1960s—partook of this impulse to lay bare the enormous costs of war to soldiers on the ground.

Military life may have seemed orderly and democratic in public imagery during World War II, but by the 1950s and early 1960s some producers of culture painted a different picture, one that featured inept officers, demoralized GIs, lax discipline, and pointless death. Some of this imagery strongly recalled what journalists had put forth during the Korean War.

With the commitment of ground troops to Vietnam in March 1965, Americans gradually became aware that their country was involved in another, strikingly similar war against communists in Asia. Though the media generally supported the Vietnam War at least until 1968—as they initially had supported the Korean War—that did not prevent the proliferation of disturbing images of the American GI. Combat photographers in Vietnam once again zeroed in on the faces of the soldiers, sometimes streaked with tears, sometimes contorted in pain, sometimes in death. David Douglas Duncan, the great chronicler of the Korean War, was on hand again in Vietnam, taking the same sorts of pictures. As early as 1967 journalists were finding cynicism and disillusionment among American infantrymen, and in turn they were valorizing the suffering of the GIs as they had in Korea. By the early 1970s the nightly television news was rife with stories of American soldiers killing Vietnamese civilians, most famously at My Lai, the scene of a large massacre revealed late in 1969. Such atrocities had not been part of the public image of GIs in Korea, but their exposure surely made some Americans wonder what had happened in that previous war. The revelation of the No Gun Ri massacre in 1999 suggested that perhaps the Korean War had its own dirty little secrets, a fact hinted at in a few, isolated images during the war itself.⁹⁷

Finally, key elements of the Korean War GI's image—fatigue, sadness, and stoicism—would be captured faithfully, much later, in a long-awaited national memorial to the American soldiers of Korea. In 1995 nineteen larger-than-life representations of soldiers in the Korean War appeared on the Mall in Washington, D.C. The stainless steel figures trudge through the rough terrain, many looking fearful and tired, some looking sorrowful. At 7'3", the figures were cast at "heroic scale," according to the website of the Army Corps of Engineers.⁹⁸ But these GIs are heroic in the context of the Korean War. Like their real-life counterparts fifty years earlier, the metal soldiers inspire wonder and appreciation not for their contribution to a glorious military victory, but for their stoic advancement—in whatever direction—under a tremendous burden. As in many photographs from the war, that quality is etched on their faces.

Notes

1. *Time*, July 31, 1950, 17. Although "Kilroy was Here" was the most popular piece of graffiti of World War II, the identity of Kilroy remained a mystery. In 1945 *Newsweek* claimed he was Sergeant Frank Kilroy, while in 1962 the Associated Press maintained he was James Kilroy of Bethlehem Steel Company. In that version Kilroy allegedly scrawled his name on pieces of equipment for the war that he inspected, and then the slogan caught on among GIs. See M. Paul Holsinger, ed., *War and American Popular Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999), 275-6.

2. In this essay I will discuss the most prominent imagery of American GIs, which, not surprisingly, consisted mainly of white soldiers. There is also a compelling story to tell, however, about the changing nature of the media's portrayal of African-American GIs. Due to space limitations, I cannot relate that story here. I do so in my dissertation, "The Embattled Americans: A Cultural History of Soldiers and Veterans, 1941-1982" (PhD diss., Brown University, 2004).

3. See, for example, Ernie Pyle, *Here is Your War* (New York: Henry Holt, 1943); Bill Mauldin, *Up Front* (New York: Henry Holt, 1945). Most of Hal Boyle's dispatches for the Associated Press, including his famous column, "Leaves from a War Correspondent's Notebook," are housed at the Wisconsin Historical Society in Madison. Boyle's war coverage earned him a Pulitzer Prize in 1945.

4. In Richard Kohn's words, Willie and Joe "were meant to represent an anonymous mass of citizen soldiers." See Richard H. Kohn, "The Social History of the American Soldier: A Review and Prospectus for Research," *The American Historical Review* 86 (June 1981): 556. For discussion of the democratic nature of the military in World War II imagery, see Benjamin L. Alpers, "This is the Army: Imagining a Democratic Military in World War II," *The Journal of American History* 85 (June 1998): 129-63.

5. Susan Faludi, *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man* (New York: William Morrow, 1999), 23.

6. Quoted in George Roeder, *The Censored War: American Visual Experience During World War Two* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 51.

7. For discussion of these and other facets of World War II imagery, see Roeder, *The Censored War*, 1-25, 130; Susan D. Moeller, *Shooting War: Photography and the American Experience of Combat* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), 155-247.

8. For just two examples of the smiling, wounded soldier of World War II in magazines and advertisements, see *Saturday Evening Post*, July 7, 1945, 53; *Life*, September 3, 1945, 29. For "Can't keep a good man down," see *Newsweek*, March 20, 1944, inside cover.

9. See John Horne Burns, *The Gallery* (New York: Harper, 1947); Norman Mailer, *The Naked and the Dead* (New York: Rinehart, 1948).

10. Fletcher Pratt, "A Long, Tough Fight," *New Republic*, July 24, 1950, 11.

11. James M. Minifie, "Caught Short on Korea," *The Nation*, July 22, 1950, 74.

12. Bevin Alexander, *Korea: The First War We Lost* (New York: Hippocrene Books, rev. ed. 2000), 46-52.

13. Marguerite Higgins, *War in Korea: The Report of a Woman Combat Correspondent* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1951), 85.

14. Roy E. Appleman, *United States Army in the Korean War: South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu (June-November 1950)* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1961), 110, 264.

15. George Q. Flynn, *Lewis B. Hershey, Mr. Selective Service* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 162-89.

16. Alexander, *Korea*, 46-52.

17. Moeller, *Shooting War*, 273-81.

18. *Newsweek*, July 17, 1950, 13.

19. *Life*, July 17, 1950, 33.

20. *Time*, July 31, 1950, 16.

21. *Newsweek*, August 28, 1950, 15.

22. See, for example, Universal Newsreel, "New Aid Rushed to Korea," July 31, 1950; Vol. 23, Reel 374; Universal Newsreels, Record Group 200; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD. (hereafter NACP).

23. *Time*, July 24, 1950, 20-1.

24. Higgins, *War in Korea*, 84.

25. *Newsweek*, August 7, 1950, cover; *Time*, August 21, 1950, 20.

26. "Time for Defense," July 25, 1950; Sound Recording 330-TFD-39; Records of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Record Group 330; NACP. *Time* magazine reported that "millions of radio listeners" heard the broadcast, but printed much of it anyway. See *Time*, August 7, 1950, 20.

27. Countering this mythology of World War II were scholars of the late 1940s, who found that GIs in that war had been motivated in combat by comradeship rather than patriotism, surely true in the Korean War as well. See Samuel Stouffer et al., *Studies in Social Psychology during World War II: The American Soldier*, 4 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948-1952); S.L.A. Marshall, *Men Against Fire: The Problem of Battle Command in Future War* (Washington: Combat Forces Press, 1947).

28. David Douglas Duncan, *This is War!: A Photo Narrative in Three Parts* (New York: Harper, 1951), no page numbers.

29. *Time*, August 28, 1950, 22.

30. *Life*, September 18, 1950, 41-7. The Duncan pictures would figure heavily in his own book, *This is War!* and the Museum of Modern Art's photographic exhibit *Faces of Korea*, both of which appeared in 1951 and are discussed in detail later in this article.

31. Quoted in Moeller, *Shooting War*, 300.
32. Appleman, *Unites States Army in the Korean War*, 605-6.
33. *Life*, July 10, 1950, 19.
34. Others have also noticed that *Life* magazine sent mixed signals during the Korean War. Studs Terkel, quoted first in the *Chicago Tribune* in 1985 and subsequently in George Roeder's 1993 book on World War II imagery, said that despite *Life* editor Henry Luce's status as a staunch cold warrior and supporter of the war, his magazine's photos "captured the murkiness of this new conflict." See Roeder, *The Censored War*, 174, note 22.
35. *Life*, July 17, 1950, 34-5.
36. Combat Bulletin 101, "Battle for Time," 1950; Motion Picture 111-CB-101; Records of the Office of the Chief Signal Officer, Record Group 111; NACP.
37. See, for example, Universal Newsreels, "Decisive Battle Rages," August 14, 1950; Vol. 23, Reel 378; "The Korea Story," August 17, 1950; Vol. 23, Reel 379; "On the Korea Front," August 31, 1950; Vol. 23, Reel 383; Universal Newsreels, Record Group 200; NACP.
38. As Susan Moeller has put it, "Finally, by Korea, American visions of the glory of war were being superseded by images of the sadness of it." See Moeller, *Shooting War*, 310.
39. See Tom Engelhardt, *The End of Victory Culture: Cold War America and the Disillusioning of a Generation* (New York: Basic Books, 1995).
40. Quoted in *Time*, September 25, 1950, 26.
41. Appleman, *Unites States Army in the Korean War*, 264, 382.
42. Alexander, *Korea*, 194-210, 219-39.
43. *Newsweek*, October 9, 1950, cover.
44. Combat Bulletin 102, "Turning the Tide," 1950; Motion Picture 111-CB-102; Records of the Office of the Chief Signal Officer, Record Group 111; NACP.
45. Combat Bulletin 103, "UN Offensive," 1950; Motion Picture 111-CB-103; Records of the Office of the Chief Signal Officer, Record Group 111; NACP.
46. *Newsweek*, October 16, 1950, 19.
47. *Newsweek*, October 9, 1950, 24.
48. *Newsweek*, October 23, 1950, 2.
49. This picture would resurface in Edward Steichen's photographic exhibit, *Faces of Korea*, treated later in this article. See "American Infantryman is comforted after death of his friend while man methodically fills out casualty tags," Check and Installation List for *Faces of Korea*, MoMA Exhibit #470; Record II.1/56 (12), pp. 1-4; Museum of Modern Art Archives, Department of Circulating Exhibitions, New York, N.Y. (hereafter MoMA Archives).
50. Combat Bulletin 103, "UN Offensive," 1950; Motion Picture 111-CB-103; Records of the Office of the Chief Signal Officer, Record Group 111; NACP.
51. *Time*, October 9, 1950, 33.
52. *New York Times*, November 3, 1950, 4.
53. *Newsweek*, October 16, 1950, 21.
54. *Newsweek*, October 9, 1950, 21.
55. *Newsweek*, November 6, 1950, 4-6.
56. Alexander, *Korea*, 240-8, 299-367, 405-13.
57. Universal Newsreel, "Out of the Trap!" December 14, 1950; Vol. 23, Reel 413; Universal Newsreels, Record Group 200; NACP.
58. Combat Bulletin 105, "UN Forces Escape Trap," 1950; Motion Picture 111-CB-105; Records of the Office of the Chief Signal Officer, Record Group 111; NACP.
59. *Newsweek*, January 15, 1951, cover, 1.
60. *Time*, January 1, 1951, cover.
61. *Time*, January 1, 1951, 16-23.
62. *Newsweek*, January 29, 1951, 30.
63. Combat Bulletin 107, "UN Forces Move North," 1951; Motion Picture 111-CB-107; Records of the Office of the Chief Signal Officer, Record Group 111; NACP. Emphasis added.
64. George Roeder has agreed that during World War II official images of American soldiers suggested that battle would "harden" them. This picture persisted despite a secret report from the Office of the Surgeon General that found the average infantryman could go two hundred days before experiencing mental breakdown. See Roeder, *The Censored War*, 16.
65. *Newsweek*, March 19, 1951, 30.
66. Lt. Col. Melvin Russell Blair, "I Send Your Son Into Battle," *Saturday Evening Post*, June 23, 1951, 26-7, 111-13, 116.
67. Combat Bulletin 113, "Stalemate in Korea," 1951; Motion Picture 111-CB-113; Records of the Office of the Chief Signal Officer, Record Group 111; NACP.
68. Alexander, *Korea*, 477-83; Walter G. Hermes, *United States Army in the Korean War: Truce Tent and Fighting Front* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1966), 401-97.
69. Check and Installation List for *Faces of Korea*, MoMA Exhibit #470; Record II.1/56 (12), pp. 1-4; MoMA Archives.

70. Itineraries for *Faces of Korea*, MoMA Exhibit #470; Record II.1/56 (12); MoMA Archives.
71. Check and Installation List for *Faces of Korea*, MoMA Exhibit #470; Record II.1/56 (12), pp. 1-4; MoMA Archives. These titles were used by museum personnel, and were not included with the photos in the exhibit hall.
72. Caption List for *Faces of Korea*, MoMA Exhibit #470; Record II.1/56 (12), pp. 1-4; MoMA Archives.
73. See Duncan, *This is War!*, and "After jeep accident—men driving on," Check and Installation List for *Faces of Korea*, MoMA Exhibit #470; Record II.1/56 (12), pp. 1-4; MoMA Archives.
74. *Life*, September 18, 1950, 41.
75. Duncan, *This is War!*
76. "Corporal Leonard Hayworth sees his picture in September 18 *Life* story," Check and Installation List for *Faces of Korea*, MoMA Exhibit #470; Record II.1/56 (12), pp. 1-4; MoMA Archives. Duncan dedicated *This is War!* to Leonard Hayworth and a critically wounded sergeant named Leonard Young.
77. *New York Times Book Review*, June 24, 1951, 3.
78. *New York Times*, June 25, 1951, 17. Another reviewer, Jacob Deschin, made similar comments in the *New York Times*, June 24, 1951, 12.
79. *Cavalier Daily, University of Virginia*, September 22, 1951; *Miami Herald*, August 26, 1951; *Woodstock (Vt.) Standard*, November 1, 1951.
80. Press Release for *Faces of Korea*, MoMA Exhibit #470; Record II.1/56 (12); MoMA Archives. Emphasis added.
81. Steichen quotes from Penelope Niven, *Steichen: A Biography* (New York: Clarkson Potter, 1997), 633.
82. Publicity Report, *Faces of Korea*, MoMA Exhibit #470; Record II.1/56 (12), pp. 1-4; MoMA Archives.
83. Edward Steichen, *A Life in Photography* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1963), third page after plate 225.
84. Bill Mauldin, *Bill Mauldin in Korea* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1952), 10.
85. "Longines Chronoscope," October 26, 1951; Motion Picture LW-LW-23; Former Record Group 200; NACP. The Longines Chronoscope television program was sponsored by the watch company Longines-Wittnauer, and aired three times a week on CBS. Hosting the show were executives from the media, including Ansel E. Talbert and Donald I. Rogers, editors of the *New York Herald Tribune*, and William Bradford Huie, editor of *American Mercury*.
86. "Longines Chronoscope," October 26, 1951; Motion Picture LW-LW-23; Former Record Group 200; NACP.
87. "Longines Chronoscope," November 16, 1951; Motion Picture LW-LW-28; Former Record Group 200; NACP.
88. James Michener, "The Forgotten Heroes of Korea," *Saturday Evening Post*, May 10, 1952, 19.
89. James Michener, *The World Is My Home: A Memoir* (New York: Random House, 1992), 215, 217.
90. Michener, "Forgotten Heroes," 19.
91. *Ibid.*, 126.
92. *Ibid.*, 20, 128.
93. Michener, *The Bridges at Toko-Ri* (New York: Random House, 1953), 43. The *Life* magazine version sold five million copies in July 1953. See Christian G. Appy, "'We'll Follow the Old Man': The Strains of Sentimental Militarism in Popular Films of the Fifties," in Peter J. Kuznick and James Gilbert, eds., *Rethinking Cold War Culture* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), 91.
94. Michener, "Forgotten Heroes," 20.
95. Reliable casualty figures are surprisingly difficult to find. Often cited is the figure of 33,000 American dead, but that number does not include non-battle deaths. My numbers are compiled from Alexander, *Korea*, 483; Hermes, *United States Army in the Korean War*, 501; Paul M. Edwards, ed., *The Korean War: An Annotated Bibliography* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1998), 7.
96. Theodore Caplow, Louis Hicks, Ben J. Wattenberg, eds., *The First Measured Century: An Illustrated Guide to Trends in America, 1900-2000* (Washington: AEI Press, 2001), 208.
97. See Charles J. Hanley, Sang-Hun Choe, and Martha Mendoza, *The Bridge at No Gun Ri: A Hidden Nightmare from the Korean War* (New York: Henry Holt, 2001).
98. See <http://www.nab.usace.army.mil/projects/WashingtonDC/korean.html>.