

INTRODUCTION

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The Korean Peninsula and the Korean people have survived and struggled through more than their fair share of great conflicts, invasions and power struggles, dating back to the Mongol invasions in the thirteenth century. The Korean War (1950–53) continues to be remembered on both sides of the Korean Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) and with increasing significance, as relations between the Republic of Korea (ROK), commonly known as South Korea, and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), or North Korea, are subject to volatile oscillating changes. In Australia, the details of the Korean War and Australia’s involvement in it are less widely known in comparison with the first and second world wars. Unlike the previous global conflicts of 1914–18 and 1939–45, the Korean War concluded with an armistice and without a signed peace treaty. Without a clear victor, and with subsequent Australian military commitments in other Cold War conflicts having high public profiles, the Korean War has been understandably less well known.

On 8 November 2017, US President Donald Trump’s inaugural visit to the Korean DMZ was halted because of the familiar onset of a cold and thick fog over one of the most contested and heavily militarised borders in the world. The cold and the fog is a physical reality of the weather patterns common to the Korean Peninsula, but the fog of war is also a military and political reality. Deception, covert action, subversion and nuclear brinkmanship have long been hallmarks of the relationship between North and South Korea. In the past North Korea has utilised conciliatory statements about further dialogue with the South while threatening nuclear and conventional attacks against the ROK, Japan and the United States.

The significant degree of uncertainty in decision-making during such conflicts as the Korean War was summed up by former US Defence Secretary Robert S. McNamara when he declared that ‘war is so complex, it is beyond the ability of the human mind to comprehend the variables’.¹ To paraphrase the renowned German military philosopher Carl von Clausewitz, it is important to note the friction that exists between what each side expects a war to be like and what the nature of combat turns out to be.² At present, the fog of war continues to hover over the Korean Peninsula because comparatively little of what is known and understood about North Korea is ever put in the context of its strategic decisions and ambitions. The ancient Chinese strategist Sun Tzu is said to have declared that ‘he who knows the enemy and himself will never in a hundred battles be at risk’.³ The fog of war hung over the heads of military commanders on both sides during land battles such as the Battle of Maryang San, and the deception and uncertainty associated with the fog of war continues to this day through the brinkmanship and military posturing associated with deliberations between the United States, China and North Korea, among others.

This edited compilation of papers on the history of Australia’s involvement in the Korean War is based on the 2011 Australian War Memorial international conference, ‘Korea: In from the Cold’, which marked the sixtieth anniversary of the Battles of Kapyong and Maryang San, landmark events in which Australian troops were involved. This volume closely explores some widely forgotten aspects of the Korean War with historical analysis, and with a focus on bringing to light perspectives of the digger, the nurse, the ally, the strategist, the historian and the adversary. Since 2011, the introduction, conclusion and some of the chapters—particularly chapters 12 and 16—have been updated and revised to ensure that the publication is relevant.

This edited collection draws upon the experiences and expertise of senior military figures and scholars to assess the extent and scope of the Korean War’s ongoing relevance for the future of Australia and the globe in the twenty-first century. It is more than just an anecdotal account

1 E. Morris, *Fog of War: Eleven Lessons from the Life of Robert S. McNamara*, documentary, Sony Pictures Classic, United States, 2003.

2 S.J. Cimbala, *Clausewitz and Chaos: Friction in War and Military Policy*, Praeger, Westport, CT, 2001, p. 197.

3 S. and R.T. Ames, *Sun-Tzu: The Art of Warfare: The First English Translation Incorporating the Recently Discovered Yin-Ch’üeh-Shan Texts*, 1st edn, Ballantine Books, New York, 1993, p. 113.

of participant figures. It is a reflection that has considerable resonance for military practitioners, policy-makers and strategists considering possible futures. The purpose of this book is to draw upon this expertise, knowledge and experience of Australia's role and the roles of others in the Korean War and reiterate the ongoing relevance and significance of the Korean War because, ultimately, the conflict remains unresolved to this day. Indeed, with security challenges on the Korean Peninsula often dominating headlines, a detailed understanding of Australia's military role 70 years ago is particularly pertinent; even more so as contingencies that could see Australian troops deployed once more on operations in north-east Asia are not far-fetched.

The Korean War began in June 1950, when communist North Korea invaded US-aligned but independent South Korea. With a rare UN Security Council mandate authorised after the Soviet Union walked out, a US-led UN coalition promptly drove the North Koreans back, but an optimistic pursuit of North Korean forces right up to the Yalu River, bordering communist China, should have raised real questions about how the People's Republic of China (PRC) would react. The Soviet delegate was absent from the vote on Korea because the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was boycotting the UN Security Council over the US refusal to replace Nationalist China (Taiwan) with the PRC. The UN high command should have considered Chairman Mao Zedong's imperative to prevent the collapse of the DPRK and secure China's border with the Korean Peninsula. The confidence of the UN commander, General Douglas MacArthur, lay at least in part on his belief that he could once again employ nuclear weapons to tip the balance. US President Truman's refusal and subsequent dismissal of MacArthur set a precedent that has lasted to the time of writing; nuclear weapons remain off limits for limited military contingencies such as the Korean War. When an armistice was signed in July 1953, the border between the two Koreas remained close to where it had been at the start of the war. A state of suspended hostilities has existed between the two states ever since. We are reminded periodically by exchanges of fire over the Korean border, blustering provocations, nuclear brinkmanship and high-stakes 'peace talk' negotiations that the Korean War, long dormant, has never quite ended.

The inconclusive outcome of the Korean War is in distinct contrast to the total defeat of the Axis powers at the end of the Second World War. That had been a total war, fought by mass armies that required the mobilisation of resources on a global scale and which culminated with the dropping of

atomic bombs. In the shadow of the nuclear age and with Korea being only one of a number of US security problems, the Korean War was conducted as a geographically and politically limited conflict—a conflict that the communists and the UN forces wanted to confine to the peninsula and surrounding areas for fear of escalating to global proportions. Dwarfed by the enormity of the Second World War and coming so soon after it, the Korean conflict took place, to all intents and purposes, under the vast and lingering shadow cast by the Second World War.

For all these reasons, the Korean War has only occasionally engaged the popular imagination and collective memory. Indeed, it was initially described as a ‘police action’ of the United Nations, reflecting the lack of a formal declaration of war. For the most part, it is known simply as the forgotten war. These appellations could not be more wide of the mark; the Korean conflict was, and remains, extremely significant on any number of grounds. It was the first war fought under the aegis of the United Nations (the next coming 40 years later with the Gulf War of 1991). The entry of the PRC into the war against the UN coalition put the PRC under the leadership of Chairman Mao Zedong on the world stage for the first time. Incidentally, the entry of the PRC indirectly into the conflict took place barely a year after their defeat of Chiang Kai-shek’s Kuomintang (KMT) forces in 1949, the culmination of a long Chinese civil war. The PRC continues to view the sustained US Army presence and the Terminal High-Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) air defence system in South Korea with considerable suspicion and as a threat to its core security interests on the Korean Peninsula.

As the conflict took place at a time of acute Cold War tensions, and when the United States no longer had a nuclear monopoly, a key concern was to prevent escalation. A policy of conflict containment rather than decisive victory ensued, which resulted in the Korean War being the first ‘limited war’. Neither side wanted to see the conflict in Korea escalate to open warfare beyond the Korean Peninsula for fear of a nuclear conflagration. Not surprisingly, the political context was uncertain and a clear-cut plan for military victory was absent, which meant that, over time, and in the absence of a clear path to victory, popular support for the Korean conflict waned among the major UN coalition partners. This pattern has since been repeated in such conflicts as Vietnam and Afghanistan. During the three years that the conflict lasted, and particularly in the first year, the fighting

was frequently on an epic scale. It involved new technologies, such as jet aircraft, and took place over very hilly terrain and in climatic extremes, among which the harsh Korean winter imposed the severest trial.

The casualties of the conflict were appalling. South Korea and the 21-member UN coalition that supported it suffered almost 800,000 military casualties—dead, wounded and missing. The vast majority—well over 600,000—came from South Korea, whose critical role in bearing the brunt of the war often goes unsung. Above this, almost a million ROK civilians died. Some estimates put North Korean and Chinese losses as high as 1.5 million. The United States lost 36,574 dead.⁴ The Korean Peninsula was devastated. All this goes to show that, far from being a mere police action, the Korean conflict was a devastating war and one of the most important conflicts, politically and militarily, of the twentieth century. Indeed, the conflict has shaped the geopolitics of north-east Asia for the last 70 years and continues to be of acute geopolitical significance today.

Australia played its part in the war. It was among the first nations to answer the United Nations' call, with its Korean Force, or 'K Force'. Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) fighter and transport aircraft flew in Korean skies, and Royal Australian Navy (RAN) frigates, destroyers and the aircraft carrier HMAS *Sydney* operated in Korean waters. As Korea was principally a ground war, the main Australian combat elements came from the army. The three battalions of the new Royal Australian Regiment (RAR) fought in Korea as part of a Commonwealth formation alongside British, Canadian, New Zealand and other Commonwealth units. This was also the last time a volunteer force was raised by Australia to fight overseas. The scheme required men to serve in the Australian Army for a period of three years, which included a year in Korea. Recruiting centres opened in August 1950, and the initial quota of a thousand men was swiftly reached. Direct entry was also accepted from the United Kingdom. Volunteers continued to be accepted, and so successful was the K Force scheme that all three Australian infantry battalions were able to be brought up to full strength over time.⁵ More than 17,000 Australians served in Korea during the war. Almost 100,000 British servicemen served in Korea; 1,078 lost their lives

4 Office of Public Affairs, Washington, DC, 'America's Wars Fact Sheet', US Department of Veterans Affairs, May 2017, www.va.gov/opa/publications/factsheets/fs_americas_wars.pdf.

5 R. O'Neill, *Australia in the Korean War 1950–1953*, vol. 2: *Combat Operations*, AWM & AGPS, Canberra, 1981, p. 8.

fighting on the peninsula while Australia suffered 1,500 casualties, of whom 340 were killed.⁶ The Canadians suffered 1,558 casualties of whom 516 were killed, and New Zealand suffered 33 servicemen killed in action during the war.⁷ Some Australian and New Zealand elements remained in Korea until 1957 as part of the UN peace monitoring group.

The Korean War was also important for Australia because it was an opportunity to strengthen ties forged with the United States during the Second World War and to deepen various aspects of the bilateral relationship. Contrary to popular historical narratives, Australia looked both to the United Kingdom and to the United States after the Second World War for military support and protection, at least until the British virtually withdrew from the region in the late 1960s. Australia was particularly willing to commit forces so promptly in 1951 in part because it hoped to cement support in Washington for the Australia, New Zealand, United States Security Treaty (ANZUS), which has subsequently been widely regarded as the linchpin of Australia's security infrastructure and policy. Australia was also willing to make a limited commitment to the Korean War because of the fear that the apparent communist monolith would extend its 'red tentacles' across the Asia-Pacific region, and take over countries on Australia's periphery, threatening Australia's security. The Menzies government was also persuaded to support the UN force in Korea because it was a multinational effort that included smaller powers such as South Africa and Ethiopia, and newly independent powers such as India, as well as Australia's traditional allies, the United States and the United Kingdom.

Literature review

This work provides a fresh take on a war that has receded from mainstream consciousness, but that does not mean that the war has not been examined in detail by others. Indeed, there is a considerable body of literature that covers many aspects of the Korean War. What follows is by no means a comprehensive review of the literature, but it emphasises the different

6 BBC, 'Britain's Forgotten War', 20 April 2001, news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/1285708.stm.

7 'Canadians in Korea', www.kvacanada.com/canadians_in_the_korean_war.htm; 'New Zealand in the Korean War', Ministry for Culture and Heritage, nzhistory.govt.nz/war/korean-war.

national and military perspectives on the Korean War and the different historical approaches and ways in which scholars and military practitioners have analysed the conflict.

For Australia, the most significant and authoritative voice is Robert O'Neill's two-volume official history of Australia in the Korean War. O'Neill has written a detailed, comprehensive and seminal history of Australian air, sea and land operations on the peninsula between 1950 and 1953. O'Neill's first volume, *Strategy and Diplomacy*, adopts a broad perspective on why and how Australia chose to contribute to the Korean War, noting that while the Korean War 'did not create the ANZUS alliance', the Australian Government did see the war as an opportunity to strengthen its security ties with the United States.⁸ O'Neill's *Strategy and Diplomacy* argues that the Korean War was caused by the combination of 'local issues and tensions amongst great powers'.⁹ O'Neill explains that in the immediate post-Second World War environment, the Australian Government was rebuilding its security relationship with the United Kingdom while attempting to build a stronger security relationship with the United States. He states that if 'the war had not occurred in 1950, Australia might have become so closely involved with British security arrangements ... that the strategic nexus across the Pacific with the United States might have been weakened further'.¹⁰ O'Neill highlights that the Australian Government often shared some of the concerns of other Commonwealth nations, like India, Canada and the United Kingdom, particularly their desire 'to restrain the United States from precipitate action in response to a sudden crisis'.¹¹ However, the Australian Government was also reluctant 'to be a British appendage' in the Korean War, but it often worked within the context of cooperation with other Commonwealth nations to ensure that Australian forces were utilised appropriately.¹²

O'Neill's second volume, *Combat Operations*, presents a thorough account of the ground operations conducted by the three battalions of the Royal Australian Regiment deployed to the peninsula during the war. This volume includes analysis of key land battles involving these battalions such as the Battles of Kapyong and Maryang San. It also provides a substantial

8 R. O'Neill, *Australia in the Korean War 1950–1953*, vol. 1: *Strategy and Diplomacy*, AWM & AGPS, Canberra, 1981, p. 200.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 1.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 406.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 407.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 404.

amount of analysis and detail on the contribution of Australia's Fleet Air Arm, the maritime operations conducted by the RAN and the missions flown by the RAAF. Of particular significance were the operations of the Australian light air aircraft carrier, HMAS *Sydney*, the missions flown by No. 77 Fighter Squadron RAAF, and the deployment of HMAS *Shoalhaven* and HMAS *Bataan* shortly after commencement of hostilities in 1950.

In the official British history of the Korean War, *The British Part in the Korean War*, Sir Anthony Farrar-Hockley argues that in 1950 the British Government saw little to gain from contributing to the UN force in Korea because of the perceived lack of substantial British interests. Farrar-Hockley explores how the United Kingdom was also dealing with lingering wartime debts, worldwide imperial commitments and the decolonisation of parts of the British Empire.¹³ In the end, Britain contributed to the UN force at the request of the United States and because the spread of communism in 1950 in 'Korea could not be ignored'.¹⁴

In the official history *New Zealand and the Korean War*, Ian McGibbon emphasises that Wellington's decision to send a ground force, as well as offering to commit HMNZS *Pukaki* and HMNZS *Tutira* to the war, resulted in a 'conflict between New Zealand's ... Commonwealth-oriented approach to international affairs and the long-term strategic requirements of its Pacific location'.¹⁵ The New Zealand official historian argues that Wellington's decision to contribute forces to the Korean War was founded in historical precedent, emotional bonds to the United States and the Commonwealth, and New Zealand's national self-interest.

In *Canada's Army: Waging War and Keeping the Peace*, Jack Granatstein presents a uniquely Canadian perspective on the Korean War, arguing that, although there were significant areas of commonality within the armed forces of the Commonwealth countries and the United States, there were also differences, for example in command style and equipment. Noting the composition of the Canadian ground forces, Granatstein argues that the formation of the 25th Canadian Infantry Brigade was chaotic and involved the recruitment of large numbers of Second World War veterans.

13 A.H. Farrar-Hockley, *The British Part in the Korean War*, vol. 1: *A Distant Obligation*, HMSO, London, 1990, p. 1.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

15 I.C. McGibbon, *New Zealand and the Korean War*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, in association with Historical Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1992, pp. 15, 101.

He also notes that, whereas senior American commanders would give very detailed instructions to their subordinates, British Commonwealth officers often allowed for more discretion on the part of their subordinates. The book also explores how Canada's forces increasingly preferred US equipment over British equipment, but at the same time resisted 'every suggestion that they draw on British or Australian supply lines'.¹⁶ This Canadian perspective reaffirms the fact that coordinating and managing the Commonwealth force in Korea—and indeed the wider UN force—took an immense effort. In the Official Canadian Army History of the Korean War, *Strange Battleground*, Herbert Fairlie Wood states that the Canadian Government was keen to stop the spread of communism in north-east Asia but also recognised that Canada had national interests to protect on the Korean Peninsula.¹⁷

The US Army in the Korean War by Schnabel, Appleman, Hermes and Mossman offers an authoritative insight into the operations and experiences of US ground forces during the war. Beyond these works, there has been a substantial amount of scholarship on the Korean War from the United States covering a wide range of topics. Some of the subjects covered include biographies of General Douglas MacArthur, including that by Weintraub, and Millett's three-volume history of the war in which he argues that the Korean War was first and foremost a conflict between the ROK and the DPRK.¹⁸ James Field Jr's *History of United States Naval Operations: Korea* states that free access to the sea is essential for the United States to 'wield influence upon this distant peninsula' and argues that the US Navy's presence in the Far East is the 'alpha and omega of Korean-American relations'.¹⁹ Malcom Cagle and Frank Manson's *Sea War in Korea* reaffirms the important role played by naval forces in the Korean War, stating that 'without command of the seas between the Free World and Korea ... the Korean War, as fought, most certainly would have been lost both militarily and politically'.²⁰ Robert Futrell in *The United States*

16 J.L. Granatstein, *Canada's Army: Waging War and Keeping the Peace*, University of Toronto Press, Buffalo, 2002, p. 323.

17 H.F. Wood, *Strange Battle Ground: Official History of the Canadian Army in Korea*, Queen's Printer and Controller of Stationery, Ottawa, 1966, p. 12.

18 A. Millett, *The War for Korea, 1945–1950: A House Burning*, University Press of Kansas, Lawrence, KS, 2005; A. Millett, *The War for Korea, 1950–1951: They Came from the North*, University Press of Kansas, Lawrence, KS, 2010.

19 J.A. Field, *History of United States Naval Operations: Korea*, Department of the Navy, Washington, DC, 1962, p. 1.

20 M.W. Cagle and F.A. Manson, *The Sea War in Korea*, United States Naval Institute, Annapolis, MD, 1957, p. 491.

Air Force in Korea 1950–1953 writes that the ‘shooting war in Korea’ and Russia’s growing nuclear air power meant that the United States Air Force (USAF) had to be rebuilt, as it had been reduced in size after 1945.²¹ The USAF grew to such an extent that its forces on the Korean Peninsula grew from 48 air wings at the start of the war to 93 active air wings at the war’s conclusion.²² *US Marines in the Korean War*, edited by Charles Smith, contends that the war on the Korean Peninsula was probably the last time that the United States Marine Corps (USMC) would undertake a Second World War–style amphibious landing.²³ Smith’s history also makes the point that the ‘political twists and turns’ of the Korean War made it difficult for the USMC to do its job.²⁴

The Korea Institute of Military History has produced an extensive three-volume history of the Korean War, which includes an introduction by Allan Millett that provides valuable insight into South Korean perspectives on the conflict. This work explores ROK strategic and operational perspectives as well as the views of ROK veterans translated into English from Korean.²⁵

Albert Palazzo in *The Australian Army: A History of its Organisation 1901–2001* argues that, compared with the Second World War in which Australia raised the equivalent of 14 divisions, Australia’s contribution to the Korean War was numerically smaller and part of a much more limited commitment to the war on the peninsula.²⁶ Palazzo also states that the Korean War identified ‘continuing deficiencies’ within the Australian Army that had developed after the Second World War.²⁷

David Horner in *The Commanders* and his more detailed biography of General Sir John Wilton, *Strategic Command*, provides a close analysis of Wilton’s role as Commander of the 28th British Commonwealth Brigade from April 1953. Horner argues that Wilton gained valuable experience and training after the Second World War, unlike many of his

21 R.F. Futrell, *The United States Air Force in Korea 1950–1953*, 2nd edn, Office of Air Force History, United States Air Force, Washington, DC, 1983, p. 709.

22 Ibid.

23 C.R. Smith (ed.), *US Marines in the Korean War*, History Division, US Marine Corps, Washington, DC, 2007, p. 3.

24 Ibid.

25 Korea Institute of Military History, *The Korean War*, 3 vols, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 2000.

26 A. Palazzo, *The Australian Army: A History of Its Organisation 1901–2001*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 2001, pp. 217–18.

27 Ibid., p. 217.

Australian Army officer colleagues, because of defence budget cuts, and that many of Wilton's 'ideas of military organisation on the grand scale' were influenced by the conduct of warfare in the European theatre of the Second World War.²⁸ Given the strong coalition flavour of the force that Australia found itself fighting alongside on the Korean Peninsula, Horner argues that Wilton 'had become well versed in joint operations and had witnessed decision-making between allies on questions of grand strategy'.²⁹ While *The Commanders* provides important biographical sketches of Wilton and other significant military figures, *Strategic Command* is the more significant text for understanding how Wilton performed his duties as head of the 28th Brigade towards the end of the war.

David Wilson's *Lion over Korea: 77 Fighter Squadron RAAF 1950–1953* demonstrates that the Korean War not only exposed weaknesses in the training of RAAF personnel but also was an important experience for the future leaders of the RAAF. Wilson describes in detail the difficulties that No. 77 Squadron faced in the transition from piston-powered aircraft to the jet-powered Meteor, particularly the lack of planning and doctrine that inhibited the use of the new aircraft.

David Horner and Jean Bou's *Duty First: A History of the Royal Australian Regiment* provides a regimental-level perspective on the operations and tactics of the Royal Australian Regiment during the Korean War. It is significant, in the context of understanding Australia's involvement, that the RAR was reliant, to a large extent, on its UN partners for artillery support, medical services, intelligence, logistics and air cooperation administration.³⁰ Importantly, this book likens the Korean War during the static period to the fighting conditions on the Western Front between 1915 and 1917, arguing that it was 'no less bloody' than earlier phases.³¹ The harsh climatic and terrain extremes are highlighted as another challenge that had to be overcome by the RAR, especially by those soldiers who had been wounded.³²

28 D. Horner, *The Commanders: Australian Military Leadership in the Twentieth Century*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1984, p. 320.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 321.

30 D. Horner and J. Bou, *Duty First: A History of the Royal Australian Regiment*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2008, p. 57.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 73.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 63.

A number of corps or regimental histories have explored various aspects of the Korean War from the perspective of other combat, combat support and service support elements of the Australian Army. John Blaxland's *Signals: Swift and Sure: A History of the Royal Australian Army Corps of Signals 1947–1972* examines the significance of a technical corps in the conduct of operations of this type. This work shows us that close working relationships developed between signallers from the United States and participating Commonwealth countries because signalling equipment and procedures had become standardised during the static period of the war.³³ While no complete Australian signals unit was deployed to the Korean War, Australian signallers did serve at the battalion and regimental levels in Korea, as well as with other Commonwealth and US units.³⁴

Cameron Forbes's *Korean War: Australia in the Giant's Playground* focuses specifically on the experiences of individual Australian soldiers. In the context of the Cold War and the atomic age, Forbes explains how the 'stunning hills and mountains' of the Korean Peninsula 'were turned into contour lines on two-dimensional military maps'.³⁵ Gallaway's *Last Call of the Bugle: The Long Road to Kapyong* also places considerable emphasis on exploring the everyday experiences and thoughts of Australian servicemen and servicewomen during the Korean War.

Despite much being forgotten amid the cold, the fog and the friction of war, a considerable body of work on the Korean War pre-dates the efforts made in this volume. Recognising the breadth and depth of scholarship in this realm is important as a point of departure for the matters discussed in the following chapters. This work not only recognises the significance of these earlier works but also relies on them as points of reference, not the least of which is the extensive work by Robert O'Neill.

Chapter outline

Australia's official historian of the Korean War, Robert O'Neill, presents Chapter 1, 'Setting a new paradigm in world order', which explores how the intervention of UN forces in defence of South Korea against the

33 J. Blaxland, *Signals: Swift and Sure: A History of the Royal Australian Army Corps of Signals 1947–1972*, Royal Australian Corps of Signals Association, Melbourne, 1999, p. 64.

34 *Ibid.*, pp. 68, 69.

35 C. Forbes, *The Korean War: Australia in the Giant's Playground*, Pan Macmillan, Sydney, 2010, p. 21.

invasion of the DPRK demonstrates the willingness of the international community to act effectively to curb interstate aggression in a post-Second World War context. Importantly, O'Neill states that there have been no other wars like the Korean War (after the Russians abstained from UN voting on the Korean War) because the permanent five members of the UN Security Council have since recognised their ability to veto and safeguard their interests. The UN Security Council veto power remains an enduring feature of geopolitics. It is clear from this chapter's analysis that British Commonwealth countries, such as Australia and Canada, sought to work especially closely and maximise the use of their fairly limited resources and manpower to full effect. Despite being geographically remote, these 'strategic cousins' have since found cause to work collaboratively in a low key manner on a range of security challenges.³⁶

Chapter 2 by Allan Millett, 'The Korean War: Which One? When?', suggests that the Korean War was a conflict that arguably began much earlier than 1950. Exploring the often overlooked period between the end of the Second World War and the beginning of the Korean War, Millett focuses on the strong sense of Korean nationalism evident on both sides of the DMZ that had emerged through hundreds of years of struggle against foreign invasions and Japan's brutal occupation between 1910 and 1945. This chapter also details Kim Il-Sung's sponsorship of a South Korean communist insurgency before the outbreak of the Korean War. It explains that a great number of North Koreans moved to the ROK because they were Christian and/or a member of the professional class, and were fearful for their lives under communist rule. Millett states that in 1950 the Soviets and the North Koreans hoped that if they conquered Seoul the ROK government would capitulate and the whole peninsula would swiftly be brought under communist control. Controversially, he argues that General McArthur's famous amphibious landing at Inchon was a strategic error because it meant that China was forced to intervene. He goes on to demonstrate that the Soviets and the Chinese gave the North Koreans competing advice as to where they believed the amphibious landing would take place. Millett's final point—that both Koreas sought greater independence and self-reliance—is particularly poignant now as the DPRK and ROK entertain possibilities of rule without the military presence of the great powers on the peninsula.

36 For more on the strategic and military partnerships between Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada, see J.C. Blaxland, *Strategic Cousins: Australian and Canadian Expeditionary Forces and the British and American Empires*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 2006.

The Korean War is not forgotten in the PRC. Xiaobing Li's 'China's war for Korea' (Chapter 3) argues that the military setbacks experienced by Chinese communist forces between 1950 and 1953 are still very much remembered and analysed by commanders of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and leaders of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The chapter goes on to describe how Mao's intervention in the Korean War was a manifestation of the strategy of 'active defence' in which China would intervene on the peninsula to prevent the fall of the Kim dynasty, a move that he believed would destabilise China's northern provinces. Li makes an important observation when he notes that the disparity between the technological capabilities, military strength and experience of China and the United States was considerably greater in 1950. This raises some interesting concerns about the strength and resolve of China to safeguard its own territories and seek to influence those of its immediate neighbours.

In 'Fighting in the Giant's Playground' (Chapter 4), Cameron Forbes explains that Australia's contribution to the US-led UN force was used as a lever to assist Australia in securing the support of the United States in signing the ANZUS Treaty. Forbes paints a vivid image of the human cost of war and the lack of attention given to the hardships of Australian soldiers in the Korean War. The chapter states that the British and Commonwealth Forces were able to veto orders and operations given by US military leaders if they deemed them to be potentially too costly or wasteful in human lives and resources. This point reflects contrasting approaches to the use of force in a limited war.

The rapid advance of the Korean People's Army (KPA) in 1950 left the ROK Army demoralised and in complete disarray. In Chapter 5, 'The transformation of the Republic of Korea Army', Jongnam Na argues that this series of military defeats convinced the US high command that the ROK Army needed considerable reform. In particular, Na argues that the United States sought to increase the effectiveness and self-sufficiency of the ROK Army by replicating US military training academies in the ROK, emphasising the importance of a better trained and better educated officer corps. US General James Van Fleet argued that the US Korea Military Advisory Group (KMAG) was essential not only in training the ROK Army but also in building stronger bonds of comradeship and closer interpersonal relationships between US troops and their South Korean counterparts. Na states that a considerable proportion of the political establishment in Washington preferred diverting US military resources

and manpower to the Middle East because they feared that the next world war would erupt there. The US political impetus behind the move to enhance the military training of the ROK Army, Na argues, was Washington's desire to relieve the political and economic pressure that the Korean War had generated on the home front.

After the intervention of the United Nations, US air power was initially forced to deploy mainly from naval air assets stationed in the Yellow Sea, the Korea Strait and the Sea of Japan because the few remaining airfields on the peninsula were vulnerable to DPRK attack. In 'The air war in Korea' (Chapter 6), Richard Hallion argues that the contributing UN air forces, led by the combined air forces of the United States, did not sustain total air superiority over the peninsula but did exercise considerable control over the skies. UN air forces exercised dominance in the air until the unofficial intervention of the Soviet air force, Voenno-Vozdushnye Sily (VVS), concentrated on an area known as 'MiG Alley'. Hallion argues that despite the popular narrative of fierce aerial dog fights between communist and UN fighter aircraft, 29.67 per cent of missions flown by UN aircraft were classified as air interdiction missions that targeted important ground objectives, such as bridges and supply dumps. Air interdiction is an aerial strategy that was utilised extensively during the Korean War to delay and hinder the vital military components by which communist forces could launch an attack or repel an advance from UN forces. Hallion explains that, after a virtual stalemate descended on the Korean Peninsula after the beginning of negotiations, the importance of the air war became even greater as holding territory already gained became the key objective for both sides on the ground.

In Chapter 7, 'Korea: The first challenge for Australian naval aviation', Jack McCaffrie explores how the Australian Navy Aviation Group (ANAG) was able to deploy on HMAS *Sydney* to the Korean Peninsula in 1951. McCaffrie argues that Australia, as one of three countries in the Asia-Pacific region that had aircraft carriers, played an important role early in the Korean conflict, especially when South Korean and UN forces were forced onto the back foot at the southern tip of the peninsula. The ANAG initially deployed with fixed-wing propeller aircraft and later acquired a helicopter squadron. Of particular significance for interforce communication, the Australian Army posted a carrier-borne army liaison section to provide machine gun instruction and training on evading the enemy for pilots who were shot down. The section provided the Navy air wing with anti-aircraft flak maps that would allow pilots to avoid heavy

concentrations of North Korean anti-aircraft fire. This chapter explains that British Commonwealth countries such as Australia and Canada could ill-afford to lose naval assets, which helps explain their reluctance to follow unquestioningly the orders of US officers.

In Chapter 8, 'Australian higher command in the Korean War', David Horner argues that governments and military leaders are forced to assess the effectiveness and suitability of their training, equipment, technology and tactics more intensely during periods of conflict than in peacetime. The Australian Army's experienced officers and non-commissioned officers utilised much of their experience and training from the Second World War in the fighting on the Korean Peninsula. Horner explores how the Australian military gained more command independence during the two world wars and how the Australian Government developed a greater ability to control the use of its assets in wartime. By 1950 the Australian military had fought in a series of conflicts alongside Commonwealth allies and the United States. These close military ties were essential in creating effective communication between contributors to the UN multinational force. In many respects, Australia's ability to shape the plans and objectives of the UN High Command was in proportion to its modest contribution of personnel and military assets. Operating as part of British and Commonwealth formations, however, saw countries working together in the face of US command dominance, and Australia achieved a high level of interoperability as a result.

Chapter 9 presents Colin Kahn's vivid front-line account of the Korean War, 'The reliving of minor tactics'. Kahn crystallises the sharp distinctions between the experiences of rank-and-file infantry men and high-ranking officers. He provides a detailed illustration of the hardships endured by soldiers on both sides, including the sheer brutality of the conflict, the difficult terrain and the bitterly cold winters on the peninsula. The chapter points out that the Australian Army's force in Korea utilised an effective combination of experienced Second World War veterans and fresh recruits eager to prove their worth after 'missing out' on fighting in the Second World War. Kahn observes that during armistice talks, Australian Army units were tasked with adopting a policy of aggressive defence, in which the primary objective was to hold on to territory already gained and to attempt to occupy more advantageous positions. He notes that Australian units were engaged in combat patrols against communist forces, as well as trench warfare during the static period of the war, concentrated around the 38th parallel and the current DMZ. Kahn considers the cold to be the

only major factor that meant Australian troops had to fight in a different fashion from the Second World War. In this context, it is noteworthy that the Australian Army fought in the Korean War with virtually the same armoury of weapons that it used during the Second World War. Skilled artillery units on both sides were essential in providing cover for combat patrols and to secure defensive positions. Kahn asserts that at a small-unit level, courage, resourcefulness and determination were essential in maintaining discipline and military effectiveness.

In Chapter 10, 'The Battle of Maryang San', Bob Breen asserts the primary importance of this 1951 engagement near the Imjin River. Breen agrees with Robert O'Neill that 3RAR and other British Commonwealth forces securing vital high ground before the beginning of ceasefire talks won an impressive but fleeting victory over numerically superior communist forces. According to Breen, the defence of Seoul and other key cities in South Korea overshadows smaller and less emotionally charged battles such as Maryang San because 'saving Seoul from advancing Chinese troops' has been perceived as more historically significant. This highly detailed analysis of the Battle of Maryang San includes a blow-by-blow tactical account of the battle, with primary source testimony from a range of ranks revealing the difficulties experienced during the operation. Breen explores the battle's legacy by highlighting that British and US forces had previously attempted to take the high ground at Maryang San and failed whereas 3RAR achieved short-term success. He attributes this success to the expertise, training and experience of individuals in the regiments rather than 'unit cohesion'. Going into the battle, 3RAR's companies were not all at full strength, and had spent the previous three months dug into defensive positions repelling attacks from communist forces and fighting a relatively static war. Breen argues that the Battle of Maryang San demonstrated the fighting tenacity of Australian troops in the Korean War and that, quoting O'Neill, it can be considered 'the greatest single feat of the Australian Army during the Korean War'.³⁷

In Chapter 11, 'Conquering Kowang San', Nigel Steel explores how the wartime experiences of soldiers and the emergence of narratives of battle can form part of a country's national identity or national story. Steel highlights how national narratives and official national histories can differ, even between close allies. This chapter demonstrates an important

37 O'Neill, *Combat Operations*, p. 200.

and often overlooked point: that there is not a single definitive or uniform version of a battle, a war or, indeed, of history. Steel examines command rivalry within the Commonwealth force during the Korean War, in particularly between the Australian and UK contingents, with both sides disagreeing over which contingent should be acknowledged more than the others. The recognition of a military unit in a particular battle can be contentious because multiple units might claim the right to be recognised and acknowledged for an achievement in an action. In any conflict each state actor seeks to cast their own forces in a positive and important light by awarding praise and acknowledgement to their own forces even when this might be at the expense of allies. A recurring theme in this volume is expanded upon in this chapter: the significant reliance that UN troops placed on supporting artillery bombardments and close air support (CAS) to level the playing field because of communist numerical superiority on the ground.

In Chapter 12, 'The Battle for Hill 317: One man's account', William Purves provides a personal reflection on his service as a young national serviceman in the British contingent serving during the Korean War. In so doing, he provides an important glimpse into the hardships and difficulties experienced by front-line soldiers. He acknowledges that communication and coordination between ground units and air assets was often difficult because of the unreliability of some of the communication equipment, and highlights the significant roles played by other Commonwealth troops in defending territory occupied by British and Commonwealth troops. The development of bonds of comradeship and trust because of the shared fighting experience in adverse conditions provides a strong emotional theme that ties Purves's highly personal account together. This chapter provides an excellent contrast in national perspective because, unlike the United Kingdom, Australia did not have compulsory national service during the Korean War; the composition of British forces on the Korean Peninsula was a mixture of professional soldiers and reservists with Second World War experience, as well as national servicemen. Purves's observation that the Chinese 'volunteers' were creative in camouflaging their positions and weaponry highlights that the PLA employed its guerrilla and conventional tactics drawn from their experiences in fighting in the Chinese Civil War to good effect during the Korean War.

In Chapter 13, 'The Samichon', Michael Kelly argues that units of the US Marine Corps, together with 2RAR and 3RAR, played a pivotal role on the Korean Peninsula through their resolute defence of the Samichon

Valley in July 1953, just days before the ceasefire. By consistently repelling Chinese forces from the defensive positions around Height 146, known by the United Nations Command as 'the Hook', UN forces prevented the communists from gaining a vital piece of territory that could have been used as diplomatic leverage or resulted in a more prolonged conflict. Kelly notes that the Hook had been highly contested before the final days of the conflict. The chapter makes the important point that, despite the war having gone into a period of little territorial movement, the visceral intensity of the military exchanges had by no means diminished. Both sides demonstrated significant tenacity in preventing their opponents from gaining ground towards the end of the conflict, despite peace negotiations having demonstrably reached the final stages before the signing of the armistice agreement. Effective artillery units were essential for both sides not only for defending key positions but also to provide cover for units on patrol forward of defended positions. Kelly highlights the key role played by New Zealand artillery units in providing effective and targeted support to UN positions in the Samichon Valley, which were under sustained attacks from Chinese artillery and infantry units. Finally, Kelly argues that there was more at stake in the Samichon Valley in July 1953 than in previous battles because the capital, Seoul, could have been threatened by a Chinese territorial victory near the current DMZ. US and Commonwealth troops overcame the Chinese offensive advances, he argues, because of better 'coordination and support between allied nations', resulting in a more effective defence of the Samichon Valley.

The Korean War marked a turning point in Australian military nursing, argues Rebecca Fleming in 'Continuing the legacy' (Chapter 14), as military nursing became increasingly professionalised and incorporated within more traditionally masculine aspects of Australian military life. This professionalisation encompassed the creation of a permanent nursing unit, as well as increased expectations within the Australian military that nurses would adhere closely to military protocols. Changes also included skills-based initiatives to allow nurses to gain more experience and have access to medical training initiatives. Fleming argues that the Korean War was the catalyst for a conflict between the established nursing focus on maintaining procedures that promoted practicality, and a wider command focus upon militarising the culture of Australian military nurses.

Peter Edwards's 'From Korea to Vietnam' (Chapter 15) provides a broader strategic perspective on the Korean conflict, contextualising it within four periods of Australian strategic policy. Edwards argues that Australia,

like other rational state actors, must consider its own national interests when they diverge from the interests of allied countries. This chapter puts into perspective the Menzies government's decision to contribute to the UN mission in Korea by exploring the tension between the globalist and regionalist approaches in Australian strategic history. Edwards argues that Australia has 'generally succeeded' in navigating the changes in the political landscape and the different security challenges that have arisen in the Asia-Pacific region. The Menzies government sought to utilise Australia's involvement in the Korean War to consolidate US support for the ANZUS alliance with Australia and New Zealand. Edwards explains that in the 1950s Australia was part of a number of different strategic triangles, which included Australia's newer Anglosphere ally, the United States, as well as the United Kingdom. Australia's alliance policy and close relationships with the United Kingdom and the United States were closely linked to fear of communism and the potential for regional conflicts to destabilise security. As a relatively minor power in the broader context of the Asia-Pacific region, Australia preferred to support multilateral military actions with other Commonwealth countries during this period. After the end of the Second World War, Australia increasingly sought to maintain the support and protection of both the United Kingdom and the United States. It was not until 1957 that Australian weapons systems would be realigned more closely with those of the United States.

Chapter 16, 'China and the Koreas', by Rowan Callick emphasises the ongoing importance of understanding the Korean War; however much the leaders have changed on both sides, many of today's tensions remain the same. Callick examines Australia's involvement on the peninsula since the war and the likelihood of Australia being embroiled in another regional conflict. He states that, while Australia has no direct territorial interest in the Korean Peninsula, the ongoing provocations between the DPRK and the ROK, and growing tensions between the PRC and the United States, form part of a wider Australian strategic concern for Australia's alliance with the United States. The chapter explores Australian political responses to the periodic sabre-rattling of the Kim dynasty, in particular Australia's close relationship with South Korea and the finalisation of the Australia–South Korea trade deal in 2014. Callick cites data from the Lowy Institute that demonstrates that the Australian public are generally aware of the Korean War but are mostly unaware of the details of the conflict, generally perceiving tensions on the Korean Peninsula in the wider context of Australia's relationship with the PRC.

Callick reinforces the idea that Australia continues to prefer working with other Anglosphere countries because of a sense of cultural familiarity and shared historical experience. His work concludes the volume by highlighting how some of the experiences and lessons of the Korean War might resonate for contemporary Australian military strategists, planners and politicians.

Reflecting on this book as a whole, it is clear that the participation of leading Korean War experts from the United States and Britain provided an appropriate coalition flavour to the original conference, and the book now provides important contrasts in perspective and experience. Chinese and Korean contributions provide views ‘from the other side of the hill’, which are essential in understanding the ongoing significance and lingering effects of the Korean War in north-east Asia, while the contributions of war veterans provide their personal views from the actual hills they attacked and occupied. Fleming’s contribution in particular provides an informative and detailed perspective on the essential but underacknowledged role of Australian nurses in the Korean War.

As part of the UN coalition, Australia contributed to the preservation of the independence of the Republic of Korea. This contribution gave the South Korean people the ability to develop their own democratic institutions over time, enabling the country to emerge as a global economic powerhouse and an important actor in the Asia-Pacific region. While it is important not to overestimate the extent to which the Australian contribution to the UN force secured a prosperous Republic of Korea, how worthwhile this defence of the ROK is today is evident in its contrast with North Korea, which has been economically crippled by one of the harshest totalitarian regimes in history. During the Soviet era, considerable economic assistance from the USSR was essential in propping up the Kim dynasty. The DPRK today relies heavily on cross-border trade and economic aid from China and upon a vast network of covert businesses bypassing UN sanctions and restrictions. As dynamics shift and pressure mounts for a dramatic shift in relations on the Korean Peninsula, it is imperative to be aware of why Australia fought in the Korean War and consider the implications for Australia’s engagement on matters concerning the Korean Peninsula today.

Considerable uncertainty remains over the prospects of a peaceful denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula. Pundits observe a fine line between crisis and opportunity, not least concerning the fate of the two Koreas. Looking back over three-quarters of a century, much has changed since the Korean War, but much remains unchanged. The military technology used by both sides today has altered immensely since the DPRK invaded the ROK in 1950. However, the difficult terrain of the Korean Peninsula and its precarious geographical position as the fulcrum of north-east Asia between Russia, China and Japan has certainly not changed. In the event of a military confrontation or crisis of some kind, Washington would expect the military support of Canberra as a major non-North Atlantic Treaty Organization member. Given Australia's contemporary and historic close military, political and institutional alliance with the United States, it is highly likely that, should conflict erupt, Australia could become embroiled in developments on the peninsula. Australia must then seriously consider whether and in what manner it would be prepared to fight in support of allies in a regional war in north-east Asia. Understanding how Australia has done so in the past and learning the lessons from that experience is an important starting point.

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