



## Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office

### POW Camps in North Korea

**Background:** The Prisoner of War (POW) experience in Korea was very much one of seasons. The North Koreans captured large numbers of American defenders within South Korea during the war's early months, July and August 1950. Then Communist Chinese Forces (CCF) entered the war. Many men were lost to the advancing CCF in North Korea, during November and December 1950, and then in South Korea, as this new enemy advanced southward, in February, April and May 1951. The CCF could often control a battle zone long enough to sweep up rear guard forces and the wounded, which increased the number of POWs in most major actions. After the summer of 1951, lines stabilized and numbers of POWs decreased to only a few men at a time. The POW camps on the map depict all major sites used. But many villages along the major routes were also used occasionally as men accumulated during their marches north.

**Early war:** The North Koreans marched U.S. POWs northward through Seoul and Pyongyang in the late Summer of 1950, then gradually to Manpo on the south bank of the Yalu River, and finally to the Apex Camps up the south bank of the Yalu River in North Korea. Survivors were delivered to CCF during the summer of 1951.

**Battles in North Korea:** In November and December 1950, massive Chinese forces overwhelmed U.S. formations at Unsan, Kunu-ri and the Chosin Reservoir. POWs from these actions staged north through holding villages, especially at Pukchin-Tarigol, Valley #1, and Kanggye, before gradually marching on to the newly formed, permanent Chinese camps on the south bank of the Yalu River. Camp 5, the first, opened in January 1951, followed by Camp 1 in April and Camp 3 that summer. Later, the CCF opened more specialized sites, such as Camp 4 for sergeants and Camp 2 for officers and aviators.

**Battles in South Korea:** Chinese forces pressed southward in the Spring of 1951. U.S. POWs—captured at Hoengsong in February, south Chorwon and Kumhwa in April, and in the mountains east of Chunchon in May—all worked gradually north and west to large holding camps near Suan, North Korea. From there, some went to specialized interrogation camps at Pak's Palace and Pike's Peak. But most staged north through Kangdong, to arrive at Camp 1 or Camp 5, later that year.

**Outpost battles (1952-53):** After U.S. forces dug in along main defensive lines, fewer men were captured. But they also staged north through the Suan Camps to Camp 1 or Camp 5. Toward the end of the war, men were simply held at Suan, then turned back from there during the exchange of POWs after war's end.

**Air Pirate Prison:** A total of 26 U.S. aircrew members and one Canadian were held at Mukden, now known as Shenyang, in Manchuria. The CCF claimed to have shot them down over Chinese airspace or after hot pursuit back into North Korea. Eleven were released at war's end, but the other 15 and the Canadian were held until 1954-55, then released through Hong Kong, since the Chinese did not consider them to be Korean War POWs.