

Washington Ceremonies Commemorate Korean War Start

By Jim Garamone
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, June 27, 2000 -- A Korean War veteran attending ceremonies here marking the 50th anniversary of the start of the Korean War June 25, carried a sign saying, "Forgotten No More."

Thousands of veterans and their families gathered at the Korean War Veterans Memorial on a sweltering day to remember the war, honor their dead and recall their deeds. President Bill Clinton told the vets that America honors their service and that their war and their sacrifices have not been forgotten.

Former Ohio Sen. John Glenn was a Marine aviator flying with the Air Force during the Korean War. Glenn told the crowd that "coming in the time shadow of World War II's huge global scope, Korea was small, but it was deadly." More than 37,000 Americans died in Korea between 1950 and 1953.

When the North Korean army poured over the 38th parallel, the communist leadership did not think the United States would go to war for South Korea. "After all, Americans didn't want another war; the blood still hadn't dried from World War II," Clinton said.

He said when President Harry S. Truman heard the news ... he knew it was time for the free world to act. "If an invasion was permitted to triumph in Korea without opposition from the free world, no small nation again would have the courage to resist aggression," Clinton said. "He knew American boys didn't fight and die to stop Nazi aggression only to see it replaced by communist aggression."

But South Korea was under the protection of the United Nations. That fledgling organization proved its mettle when it "voted to use armed force to stop armed aggression," Clinton said.

The war has not ended. The armistice signed in 1953 left the opposing sides at roughly the same spots. Critics called the war a stalemate.

"I submit to you today that looking back through the long lens of history, it is clear that the stand America took in Korea was indispensable to our ultimate victory in the Cold War," Clinton said. "Because we stood our ground in Korea, the Soviet Union drew a clear lesson that America would fight for freedom.

"Had Americans and our allies from South Korea to as far away as Turkey and Australia not shown commitment and fortitude, we could well later, as Harry Truman foresaw, have faced World War III. It is, therefore, not a stretch, to draw the line of history straight from those brave soldiers who stood their ground on ridge lines in Korea 50 years ago to the wonderfully happy young people who stood and celebrated on the Berlin Wall 10 years ago."

Defense Secretary William S. Cohen hosted the ceremony. He told the assembled vets that DoD continues to account for those listed as missing in action in Korea.

"This nation today continues to search for every warrior who fought and died to preserve the freedoms that we now enjoy and cherish," Cohen said. "[The United States seeks] the fullest possible accounting of America's fallen heroes. They did not face the horror of battle for us to turn away in the hush of peace. They did not fight so we can forget."

During his speech, the president announced the Army's Central Identification Lab identified the remains of Army Sgt. Jimmy Higgins and Sgt. Hallie Clark Jr. Both were lost in North Korea in 1950 and recovered since 1996. "They are finally coming home to be buried at Arlington National Cemetery," Clinton said.

Clinton also announced another team from the Central Identification Lab in Hawaii was flying to North Korea to seek more answers.

Secretary Cohen reminded the veterans that Americans still stand guard in South Korea. "Some 37,000 Americans -- almost the same number who died in the war -- are still standing for freedom in Korea," he said. "Soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines serve alongside the South Korean counterparts astride what has been called the world's most dangerous border."

Cohen also reminded the service members of today what they owe the veterans of Korea.

"Half a century ago, the United States entered the Korean War with a military made up of many parts, a mix of war-scarred sergeants toughened by the hard lessons of Guadalcanal, Okinawa and Normandy, and a new generation of soldiers who had only seen war on the silver screen," he said. "It was a segregated force of white, black and Hispanic, and a newly created Air Force. After three long, bloody years, we ended the battle with a military that was one of the most coherent fighting forces the world has ever known -- integrated, experienced, ready to face the Cold War."

The commemoration at the Korean War Veterans Memorial was just one portion of the day's events. Vice President Al Gore placed a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknowns at Arlington National Cemetery earlier in the day. Representatives from the 22 nations that fought under United Nations command during the war also placed wreaths at the memorial.

During the ceremony, the South Korean deputy chief of staff presented the Korean War Service Medals to six veterans. The Air Force Band, the Army Chorus and the Marine Corps Drum and Bugle Corps entertained the veterans and Connie Stevens, who performed in USO shows in Korea in 1953, reprised her role. A flyover of Korean War planes ended the day.



Vice President Al Gore, Korean War veteran Vincent Krepps, Military District of Washington Commander Army Maj. Gen. Robert Ivany and Defense Secretary William S. Cohen render honors as a bugler blows "Taps" during a ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery, Va. June 25. (Photo by Jim Garamone)



Representatives of the 22 nations that fought under United Nations auspices during the Korean War get ready to place wreaths at the Korean War Veteran Memorial in Washington June 25. (Photo by Jim Garamone)



Korean officers listen to speeches during the 50th anniversary commemoration of the beginning of the Korean War June 25. (Photo by Rudi Williams)



A Canadian officer salutes after placing a wreath at the Korean War Veterans Memorial in Washington. Representatives of the 22 UN allies who fought in the Korean War participated in the ceremony. (Photo by Rudi Williams)



French representatives salute after placing a wreath at the Korean War Veterans Memorial in Washington during 50th anniversary commemoration activities June 25. (Photo by Rudi Williams)



Korean War veteran Milton Seidel, 68, protects himself from the sun during the 50th Anniversary Commemoration of the start of the Korean War June 25. Seidel, who served with the U.S. 8th Army, joined about 7,000 other veterans for the ceremonies. (Photo by Rudi Williams)