



# The Korean War and its Legacy

## HA Teacher Fellowship Programme 2019

### Online course, Week 6:

### The British domestic experience of the Korean War

The focus this week shifted from the experience of British military service personnel in the Korean War to the ways in which the war was experienced back in Britain and the impact it had.

One fascinating area was the way in which the reports of the brainwashing of POWs in Chinese run camps was viewed back in Britain with anxiety:

- *Huxford also discusses how the Chinese treatment of POW leads the Korean War to become associated in Britain with mind control and this evolves into the concept of 'brain-washing.' Such concerns contribute to vigorous military interrogations when POWs return home. The actions of the British double agent Blake, who was in these camps, also contributes to changes to British policy, regarding those who have been held in custody by Communists being subject to potential purging or a lack of promotion. As do those of Condron, the only British prisoner who 'defects' during the conflict, as he writes a book called 'Thinking Soldier', in which he notes his education in a POW camp made him reject the British line in Korea. By 1960, Huxford notes that in spite of the British elite less wholeheartedly buying into the concept of 'brain-washing' vs. the USA the British military are using 'counter-brain-washing' techniques in their training by 1960.*

As readers and the Fellows have seen on several occasions there is an ever-present theme of the Korean War as a forgotten war. Some Fellows noted how this seemed to be reflected in the relative lack of attention paid even to those protesting against it:

- *The perception that I want to focus on, very much linked to listening to all of the reels about Andrew Condron who defected to China, is the anti-war movement. I had no idea of the extent of this movement ... The anti-war groups such as the CPGB, BPC and BCFA as well as individuals like Felton, the 'Red Dean' of Canterbury Hewlett Johnson and journalists Cameron and Hardy were all protesting about the conditions and treatment of the ordinary Korean people including the suspected use of biological warfare ... Huxford argues that short term impact of these anti-war movements was limited, but there were some short lived 'panics'. This could be in part due to the lack of consistent engagement by the British public in the war as it was too far away, too foreign and too complex for most British to understand. She states that the 1953 England Ashes win superseding the Korean servicemen's return from the war in the media is testament to this. On the other hand, she does mention the 'McCarthyite' treatment of some anti-war individuals such as the sacking of Felton, Cameron and*

*Hardy for trying to highlight the atrocities of war which suggests there was a valid concern at a high level (media and civil service).*

- *The more I read about the Korean war, the more I believe that it absolutely should not be a forgotten war. This week I found Grace Huxford's chapter and podcast about opposition to the war enthralling. The war clearly helped to shape some of the divisions in British society that emerged as a result of the Cold War and as someone who was a member of CND in the 1980s, I read with fascination that the beginnings of a Cold War peace movement began with Korea, a rehearsal for the more coherent movements of the 60s and later ... for me one of the privileges of teaching history is the opportunity to bring voices of ordinary people from the shadows into the limelight ... This week reading about some of the people at the time who sacrificed their careers to ensure the war was made public, the suffering not forgotten, makes me want to give these voices the opportunity to become more widely known, allowing students to become active participants, joining a protest against Korea as a forgotten war.*

In a similar vein, some of the Fellows are getting increasingly interested in the memorialisation of the Korean War:

- *The most striking aspect is the lack of distinct Korean War memorials in the UK – most towns have added Korean War veterans to their own pre-existing memorials of the First and Second World War at the bottom of the list of names. While it is not surprising that the US has quite a few Korean War specific memorials – it is perhaps more interesting to consider that Australia also has two specific Korean War memorials, a national memorial in Canberra and a Queensland-specific one in Gold Coast. The Canberra one is quite distinctive with a lot of space given to it, and is designed to specifically evoke the harsh conditions (especially the cold weather) often associated with the war. The London memorial by contrast seems fairly small and 'out of the way' – located in the Victoria Embankment Gardens between the MoD and the river Thames. There is also quite a distinctive Scottish memorial in West Lothian – which is the only one in the country that contains all the names of the over 1,000 soldiers who died and with a tree planted for each of these dead servicemen. It also has a distinctive Korean-style shrine as the centrepiece of the memorial. This seems to me, in many ways, a more fitting dedication to those soldiers than the memorial in London but both are much more humble (or modest if you were being critical) than the more ostentatious dedications seen in the United States and Australia.*

## Core resources

- Cold War Conversations Podcast  
<https://coldwarconversations.com/episode31/>

## Secondary sources

- Grace Huxford, *The Korean War in Britain: Citizenship, Selfhood and Forgetting* (Manchester University Press, 2018)
  - Chapter 4: **Brainwashing in Britain: Korean War Prisoners of War** – this chapter explores both the experience of Korean War prisoners of war (touching on last week's themes) and the popular response to POWs back in Britain. [Attached]
  - Chapter 5: **How to Bring the Boys Home: Popular Opposition to the Korean War** – this chapter explores how certain portions of the British public opposed the war back in Britain. [Attached]

## Primary sources

- [British Political Cartoon Archive](#), held at the University of Kent. Search for "Korea", then order by date so you can look at the cartoons from 1950-3.
- *A Hill in Korea* (1956). This was Michael Caine's first film, fresh from National Service in Korea himself. He has discussed this in his autobiographies.
- *M\*A\*S\*H*
- The Unveiling of the Korean War Memorial, Victoria Embankment, 2014 - <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/memorial-to-the-korean-war-unveiled-in-london> and <http://www.britishkoreansociety.org.uk/news/memorial-to-britains-role-in-the-korean-war-unveiled-in-london/>
- You can also search for local UK memorials dedicated to the Korean War or which feature a Korean War panel on the UK National Inventory of War Memorials: <https://www.iwm.org.uk/memorials> How does this memorialisation differ from that of the First and Second World Wars?

## Additional reading

- Sean Greenwood (2003) 'A War We Don't Want': Another Look at the British Labour Government's Commitment in Korea, 1950–51, *Contemporary British History*, 17:4, 1-24