THE KOREAN WAR 1950-53: A 50 YEAR RETROSPECTIVE

AUSTRALIA'S WAR IN KOREA: STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVES AND MILITARY LESSONS

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In Samuel Fuller's well-known 1951 film about the Korean War, *The Steel Helmet*, there is a scene in which an American GI asks his sergeant, 'How do you tell a North Korean from a South Korean?' The sergeant replies, 'If he's running with you he's a South Korean. If he's running after you he's a North Korean'.[1] This exchange reflects the moral and physical paradoxes that have made the Korean War the so-called' forgotten war'.[2] Unlike the Second World War with its clear-cut enemies and its moral crusade for decisive victory, Korea seemed confusing and indecisive. The conflict was partly a civil war; partly an East-West ideological struggle; partly a United Nations police action; and partly an inter-state conventional war.

Korea was probably the most important transitional conflict of the twentieth century. It was both an epilogue to the post-Second World War era and a prologue to the new age of the Cold War, and as such the conflict reflected both old and new. For instance, the actual fighting in Korea seemed to recall not only the Second World War but also the First World War. Soldiers were confronted by stark terrain and by a stalemate that recalled the trench conditions of the Western Front in 1916. In its early stages, the war seemed to be an extension of the Second World War—symbolised by the fact that the United Nations (UN) forces were led by one of the titans of twentieth century warfare—Douglas MacArthur. Yet MacArthur's doctrine of 'there is no substitute for victory' was rendered obsolete by new Cold War restraints on the use of military force. The Korean War was the birthplace of the doctrine of limited war and was fought against a background of atomic weapons, new jet aircraft and new psychological warfare techniques.[3]

MacArthur's dismissal in 1951 became a metaphor for Korea's character as a war without great heroes—a confusing, limited, difficult and seemingly thankless conflict. The war failed to capture the Western imagination: there was, for America, no Sergeant York and no Audie Murphy and, for Australia, no Albert Jacka and no Diver Derrick. Films often serve to register a war in the popular imagination: whereas the Second World War produced *Sands of Iwo Jima*, a reverential salute to the Second World War in the Pacific, Korea produced the grim and harrowing *Pork Chop Hill*, a movie about the futility of combat in Korea.[4]

By 1951 the future seemed to belong not to flamboyant Caesars like MacArthur but to more prosaic military technicians such as Matthew B Ridgway. Such military technicians had to learn to wage limited war in which there would be no vanquished and no victors. In April 1951, at his first press conference, the new commander of the US Eighth Army, General James Van Fleet, was asked by an American correspondent: 'General what is our goal in Korea?' Van Fleet replied, 'I don't know. The answer must come from higher authority'.[5] It was an answer MacArthur would never have given. In this way, in Korea, the realities of a new age came to outweigh the values of an old era.

Looking back over a half century we can now see that Korea was emblematic of the emerging Cold War—a sort of *film noir* war—murky and ambiguous. Male American teenagers sensed this ambiguity with their famous 1951 catch phrase: 'Boys, there's two things we gotta avoid: Korea and gonorrhea'.[6] Korea was remarkably modern in its character. As a UN war it anticipated the model of the 1991 Gulf War by some forty years. The conflict showed how the UN should work against a dangerous rogue state and yet, how it could not work, because of the global ideological rivalry of the Cold War. The multinational response to aggression in Korea brought troops from North America, Australasia, Europe and Africa together to fight communism. Marxism-Leninism has since passed away as a world force but the legacy of the international security cooperation which began in Korea is today a staple of UN peace enforcement missions from Bosnia to East Timor.

Where does Australia fit into the broad background sketched? What was the meaning of this curious and seemingly unique war for Australia? This essay seeks to answer these questions by exploring three interrelated areas. First, by way of background and context, it analyses the significance of the war in Korea as a catalyst in the shaping of Australian strategic thinking to meet the demands of limited conflict in the new Cold War age. It is argued that Korea was an important factor in focusing Australian strategy towards the use of force as a tool of diplomacy and in defining the Asia-Pacific as Australia's unquestioned area of strategic concern. Second, the essay examines the way in which Australia used the instrument of military force in Cold War conditions of limited war. Although all three services were represented in Korea, the roles of the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) and the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) have been dealt with elsewhere.[7] This study concentrates on the role of land forces in what was, after all, predominantly a land war. It argues that the deployment of Australian troops in Korea was important in both establishing the integration of Australian diplomacy and strategy in Cold War conditions as well as creating the professional foundation of the Australian Regular Army.

Korea reinforced both Australian security and the Australian military's reputation for tactical excellence. The conflict provided the Regular Army with its only experience of twentieth century conventional war. Above all, and to use a boxing analogy, Korea established the tradition of Australia punching above her weight in international security. The modern notion of Australia as the agile middleweight fighting beside the friendly heavyweight was firmly established in Korea. Third, the essay looks briefly at the politico-military legacy of the Korean conflict for Australia. It argues that the conflict was crucial in helping to integrate Australian foreign and defence policies in order to exploit the peculiar political climate of the Cold War. Indeed, Korea began an era in Australian security that lasted for twenty years and ended only with the withdrawal from Vietnam in the early 1970s.

The Background and Significance of the Korean War to Australia

The Australian foreign correspondent, Richard Hughes, wrote in September 1952 that the Korean War had no soul.[8] It is true that for most Australians Korea is much less significant than the Second World War. It is the shadow war that fits between the Second World War and Vietnam—two twentieth century conflicts that resonate powerfully in the national consciousness. For many younger Australians, Korea is a conflict that one associates with the American television series *M.A.S.H.*

Yet Korea was, in many ways, a more significant transitional war for Australia than it was for the United States, for two reasons. First, Korea occurred at a time when there was considerable debate over the relationship between defence and foreign policy in Australian official circles. There were sharp differences in outlook between the Liberal-Country Party coalition that had just assumed office and its Labor predecessor. The Korean War proved to be an important catalyst in defining the role of defence in foreign affairs for the next twenty years. Second, Korea became the last war Australia was to fight in the twentieth century outside of South-east Asia. Before the Korean conflict, Australia accepted in principle at least, a commitment to fight in the Middle East as part of a British Commonwealth strategic plan. Korea helped to create the Australia, New Zealand, United States (ANZUS) security treaty and, followed as it was by Malaya, Borneo and then Vietnam, established that Australia's primary area of strategic interest was the Asia-Pacific region.

The Debate over Defence and Foreign Affairs

The Korean War occurred at a time of transition from Labor to Liberal rule in Australia and at a time of important strategic redefinition. In his magisterial official history, Robert O'Neill argues that in 1950 there was little division between the major political parties on defence matters. He believes that any difference between the Menzies Government and the Chifley Opposition on defence policy 'was essentially one of priorities rather than principle'.[9] In terms of fiscal spending on defence and in constructing new postwar military forces O'Neill is right; there was bipartisanship on the need for restrained spending and on creating a balanced military force structure. In addition, despite differences in emphasis, there was also a broad consensus on both sides of politics about the necessity for security co-operation within the framework of the British Commonwealth.

However, beyond these procedural issues, the principle of using military force as a component of diplomacy was fiercely contested in Australian politics after the Second World War. Between 1945 and 1949, the Chifley Government developed a foreign policy whose main feature was one of idealism based on a notion of liberal internationalism. The main architect of this vision was Dr HV Evatt, the Minister for External Affairs. In Evatt's world view, Australia's security was to be found not through bilateral alliances, but through internationalist liberal principles and collective security as demonstrated by his presidency of the General Assembly of the UN in 1948. It comes as no surprise, then, that the Chifley Government established what has been referred to elsewhere as 'the Labor tradition in Australian foreign policy'—a tradition that can be traced from Evatt in the 1940s to Gareth Evans in the 1990s.[10] The basic principles behind this approach were, and in many ways remain, a preference for a broad foreign policy combined with a narrow defence policy—or put more simply international diplomacy but continental defence. As Gareth Evans and Bruce Grant wrote in their important 1991 book, *Australia's Foreign Relations in the World of the 1990s*, foreign policy is multi-dimensional in nature and should not be inhibited by questions of defence policy.[11]

The Liberal and Country parties challenged the Evatt vision of internationalism. Leading figures from the opposition such as Percy Spender and Paul Hasluck possessed little faith in multilateral diplomacy, which they often likened to a form of larrikinism.[12] These men believed that Australia had to rely for its security on bilateral relationships and that in shaping a usable foreign policy questions of defence and military force remained fundamental. As Spender once put it, all that the United Nations offered Australia was enlightened arbitration not lasting security.[13] The Liberal Party's scepticism towards the role of idealism in international affairs can be traced from Robert Menzies to John Howard.[14]

At the end of the 1940s there was a modern philosophical division in Australian foreign policy between idealism and realism. While Gareth Evans and Bruce Grant have argued that the dichotomy in Australian foreign policy between realism and idealism can be exaggerated, these terms are useful as a means of understanding the significant difference between the Australian Labor Party (ALP) and the Coalition regarding the use of force as a tool of foreign policy during the late 1940s and the 1950s.[15] This difference was magnified and complicated—some might say distorted—by the growing shadow of the Cold War. The onset of the Cold War was of much greater concern to the Liberal Party than it was to the ALP Government. To the Liberals, the events of 1947-49—the outbreak of communist insurgency in Malaya, the Greek civil war, the Berlin airlift and the formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)—signalled the looming failure of the UN in managing international conflict. Evatt disagreed with this analysis of international relations. As David Lee has noted, to Evatt, 'the Cold War resulted not from innate and irreconcilable differences between the great powers, but from reformable defects in the international mechanisms for solving disputes'.[16]

In February 1949 the differences between Australian idealist-realist philosophies were illuminated in parliament. The Opposition leader, Robert Menzies, described Evatt's approach to international security as one of treating the principle of justice and the practice of using force as if they were complete opposites.[17] Menzies argued that force and expediency were elements of statecraft that could not be lightly rejected. He pointed out that the Berlin crisis had not been solved by appeals to international justice but by the expedient of using Western air power. Accordingly, international aggression could not be checked by the UN but only by the Western powers led by the United States acting in unison.[18] When the Menzies Government took office in December 1949 its realist approach ensured that Australia would try to seek security in the bosom of the West, specifically the Americans, rather than relying on the UN. However this was no easy task. In 1949 the political conditions for Australia to secure itself within an American-led Pacific alliance were largely missing.

At the end of 1949 American attention was fixed firmly on Europe. Washington did not seem to demonstrate much interest in an Asia-Pacific security system. Australia had attempted to seek security within the British Commonwealth through the Australia-New Zealand-Malaya (ANZAM) defence arrangement in the late 1940s. However, ANZAM came with an uncomfortable price tag: namely involvement in British strategic planning in the Middle East.[19]

The British security link always risked drawing Australia away from the Asia-Pacific into the Middle East so threatening a repetition of the Singapore catastrophe in 1942.[20] And yet, and this is an important point, given the weaknesses of the UN combined with the absence of security arrangements with the United States in the Asia-Pacific, the British Commonwealth remained Australia's only real option for security co-operation.

In 1949 Spender and his fellow realists in the Menzies Government did not see defence self-reliance as practical. They believed that an independent defence policy would be too expensive and would blunt economic development and ultimately only encourage a form of Australian isolationism. As Menzies put it in September 1950: 'Australia's defence policy must be part of a world democratic defence policy, or it will be nothing'.[21]

Resolving these conflicting problems was a testing challenge. As David Lee has argued, in its search for security the Menzies Government inaugurated what he terms 'the critical turning point in the history of Australian foreign policy'.[22] This turning point was largely forged between 1950 and 1954 and involved a deliberate decision to loosen security ties with Britain and to concentrate on building new links with the United States. In this process, the Korean War played a crucial, indeed a defining role.

The Role of Korea in Australian Strategic Thinking

The Korean War helped bring about a convergence in Australian and American security thinking. From the Australian perspective, the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950 was a reminder to the Menzies Government that the nation's fundamental security concerns were focused on a different side of the world from those of its principal ally, Britain. From the American perspective, the victory of Mao Zedong's communists in China in late 1949 followed by North Korea's aggression against the south drew American interest back into the Western Pacific and East Asia. The outbreak of the war in Korea convinced the Truman Administration that containment had to be extended to Asia as well as Europe. The convergence in Australian and American policy stemming from the Korean War allowed the realists in the Menzies Government led by Spender to begin the process of relegating the ANZAM relationship between Australia and Britain to second place in Australian security.[23]

It is a supreme irony that the Menzies Government, so often derided as 'British to its bootstraps' should, in the wake of Korea, have completed the reorientation of Australian security towards the United States. Although this reorientation had begun under John Curtin in 1941, it became decisive only in April 1951 with the signing of the ANZUS pact. Although Australia still accepted a British Commonwealth commitment to defend Malaya in the 1950s, the American-dominated ANZUS and later the South East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO)—rather than the British ANZAM arrangement—became the main vehicles for security co-operation in South-east Asia.[24]

Conflict in Korea served to reinforce the conviction of the conservative realists in the Liberal Party that the defence aspect of foreign policy was, in Cold War conditions, a fundamental aspect of international statecraft. As Menzies put it in September 1950, 'the foundation of foreign policy is defence policy. The truth of that statement ... has been demonstrated abundantly ... in respect of Korea'.[25] The Menzies Government sent Australian troops to Korea because it served Australia's purpose during negotiations towards the ANZUS pact with the United States. In short, Korea gave Menzies the opportunity to integrate defence policy and foreign policy in a quest for an Australian security system.

On 22 September 1950, as the war in Korea raged, Menzies noted that unlike the Japanese, the Communist powers, China and Russia, were not great maritime powers. Their capacity to threaten Australia physically was limited. However, as great land powers, they could do great damage to Australian interests. For this reason the Australian Army had to become a tool of diplomacy. As he put it,

> The principal purpose of an Australian Army is not to repel a land invasion, but to co-operate with other democratic forces in those theatres of war in which the fate of mankind may be fought out. In brief, and I say it quite bluntly, an Australian Army raised only for service in Australia would, in all probability, be raised for no service at all. It would be the equivalent of a wooden gun. And the democratic world cannot afford to have its common front weakened by the withdrawal into useless isolation of some of the best troops in the world.[26]

The above words represent a classic exposition of the Australian conservative realist position in the Cold War. For the Menzies Government, the Korean War served to confirm all the beliefs of the Coalition's realists in the importance of alliance politics and the weakness of the UN in collective security. In this respect Korea helped in setting the course of Australia's foreign and defence policies for the next twenty years.

The contrast with the ALP's more idealistic philosophy towards foreign and defence matters came when the Menzies Government launched a recruiting campaign for the Australian Army. The Government decided to enlist from only those individuals who were prepared to serve overseas. Opposition leader, Ben Chifley, immediately opposed this move and, in a letter quoted in parliament, he wrote that under his immediate post-Second World War Labor administration, 'the very foundation of the [Australian Permanent Military Forces] was the military defence of the continent and the islands placed under Australia's authority'.[27] He went on to state that the Coalition Government's decision to recruit volunteers willing to undertake overseas duty was in his view, 'detrimental to the efficient defence security of our country ... The Opposition cannot participate in recruiting on the basis of the entirely new obligations of the personnel to render military service anywhere in the world'.[28] Nonetheless, despite these very real differences between Menzies and Chifley on defence policy, it is important to note that the ALP never opposed Australia's involvement in the Korean War once Australian forces were committed to the UN cause.

The Nature of the Korean Conflict: Australia and the Land War 1950-53

The Korean War was overwhelmingly a land war with the US deploying six army divisions and one marine division. Despite the application of overwhelming air power and apart from the amphibious landing at Inchon, the most decisive events of the war were land actions. The latter included the initial North Korean invasion; the battles of the Pusan Perimeter and the Chongchon River in 1950; and the various allied and communist offensives and counter-offensives during 1951; and the static war of 1952-53.[29]

This is not to deny the important role played by air power in the Korean War. UN aircraft were used to pound North Korea to disrupt logistics and movement and undoubtedly weakened the communist war effort. However, aerial interdiction alone was insufficient to contain the huge communist armies. The war in Korea proved what the Russian air theorist, Alexander de Seversky, had foretold in 1942, namely that, 'total war from the air against an undeveloped country or region is well nigh futile; it is one of the curious features of [air war] that it is especially effective [only] against the most modern types of civilisation'.[30] In Korea, UN troops were still needed to restore the *status quo ante* on the 38th parallel. After 1951, General Ridgway's strategy was one of firepower attrition. He sought to stabilise the UN military line by using continuous tactical pressure and occasional set-piece battles in order to try to force the communists into negotiation.[31]

It was against this strategic background that Australian troops were committed to Korea in July 1950 in the form of the third battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment (3 RAR), consisting of 39 officers and 971 other ranks. The battalion, brought up to strength by members of the first and second battalions of the regiment (1 and 2 RAR) and by special enlistment volunteers, arrived in September 1950 during the UN drive into North Korea. It is only possible here to provide a snapshot of operations in Korea to convey the flavour of the war. The Australians were attached to the 27th Commonwealth Infantry Brigade (and later the British 28th Brigade) and saw action at Yongchu (the battle of the Apple Orchard) and at Chongju in October 1950 and then at Pakchon in November in the wake of the great Chongchon encirclement battle launched by the Chinese—an action that sent MacArthur's forces into headlong retreat from the Yalu River.[32]

The third battalion's immortal moments in Korea came first at Kapyong in April 1951 and then at Maryang San in October 1951. These two battles were exceptional unit actions and represented the baptism of fire for an Australian Regular Army (ARA) that was barely four years old. Kapyong and Maryang San remain the ARA's only conventional war experience during the twentieth century. Both battles showed that the diggers of the Cold War could match the exploits of both the 1st and 2nd Australian Imperial Force (AIF) and that the Anzac tradition was in good hands.

Yet, it is probably true to say that until recently, the two Korean battles have inspired less literary interest than say, Long Tan, during the Vietnam War. Lex McAulay's popular 1986 book, *The Battle of Long Tan: The Legend of ANZAC Upheld* with its running quotations from Shakespeare's Henry V, is arguably far better known.[33] While it is unfair to compare wars and battles—each have their own unique setting and character—it is arguable that the significance of Kapyong and especially Maryang San have only been recognized outside of the veterans' circle during the last decade.[34] In 1991 the Chief of the General Staff, Lieutenant General John Coates, observed of Maryang San that the battle lacked proper public recognition. 'The performance of 3 RAR', he noted, 'is still not widely understood. Maryang San has not received the literary or commemorative recognition afforded to other battles fought by battalions of the RAR'.[35]

Kapyong, April 1951

For Australian troops the battle of Kapyong was a rearguard defensive action followed by a fighting withdrawal.[36] The battle occurred in April 1951 when the Chinese advanced towards Seoul and overwhelmed the Republic of Korea (ROK) 6th Infantry Division so forcing the 27th Commonwealth Brigade into a defence of the Kapyong Valley. The third battalion of the RAR, along with the 2nd Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, a New Zealand artillery regiment and a company of American tanks, engaged a Chinese division.[37]

The Australians faced night attack on their position on Hill 504 and were then exposed all day in relatively open fire from all sides and cut off from other battalions. The third battalion used rearguards and close artillery support to slow the Chinese advance followed by a fighting withdrawal. Overall, 3 RAR's battle with the Chinese at Kapyong became a conventional all-arms battle with both the forward companies and battalion headquarters engaged in a continuous 24-hour action. The Chinese advance on the Kapyong Valley was halted for a cost of 32 Australians killed and 59 wounded and 3 RAR received a US Presidential Unit Citation for its action.[38]

Maryang San, September-October 1951

Lieutenant General John Coates has called the battle of Maryang San 'a post-World War II classic'.[39] There is little doubt that the battle was a brilliant example of a battalion action involving a series of deliberate and quick attacks followed by consolidation and defence against counterattack. The exploitation of surprise, the use of complementary actions, the implementation of support fires and the coordination of all arms were impressive by any standards. In particular, the quality of tactical decision-making by the Commanding Officer of 3 RAR, Lieutenant Colonel FG Hassett, is justly regarded as exceptional and remains a model for all Australian officers to study and to analyse as a battalion battle.[40]

Maryang San took place as part of OPERATION COMMANDO under which the 28th Brigade was to seize high ground—notably Hills 317 and 217—on the Imjin salient. Hassett and his officers were tasked to take Hill 317 held by two Chinese regiments. It is important to note that, prior to 3 RAR's attack, this objective had been assaulted unsuccessfully by two American battalions. The Americans had failed largely because they had not used surprise and had relied on daylight movement.[41] Hassett was determined to avoid the mistakes the Americans had made. First, he decided to utilise high ground by using the technique of 'running the ridges'—originally devised in New Guinea during the Second World War—by attacking along a wooded ridge running from the east to the summit of Hill 317. Second, 3 RAR was to advance under cover of darkness, seize a number of intermediate hills and then assault Hill 317. The final phase of the operation involved elements of 3 RAR linking up with a British battalion at a knoll on the ridge called the Hinge.[42]

The battle was a sustained offensive that lasted for five days from 3-8 October 1951. The action unfolded as a series of rifle company and platoon firefights with fire support coming from artillery and tanks. The enemy was pinned frontally and was attacked on his flanks. Despite night movement and later fog, Hassett showed particular skill in combining accurate supporting fire with well-timed infantry assaults to dislodge the Chinese from the summit of Hill 317. Once this was accomplished an Australian company had to hold the Hinge area against artillery bombardment and three fierce attacks by a Chinese battalion.[43]

During the battle of Maryang San, 3 RAR destroyed at least two Chinese battalions. The Australians counted 283 enemy killed; thirty prisoners taken and several hundred more either killed or wounded. Australian losses were twenty killed and eighty-nine wounded. The intensity of the battle can be gauged by the fact that 3 RAR's supporting artillery fired 50,000 shells while the Australians expended 900,000 rounds of small arms ammunition, and used some 12,000 grenades and mortar bombs during the fighting.[44] It was an impressive victory against a numerically superior enemy in a strong position. As O'Neill puts it, 'the victory of Maryang San is probably the greatest single feat of the Australian Army during the Korean war'.[45]

The Static War, January 1952-July 1953

Apart from actions such as Kapyong and Maryang San, Australian troops participated in 'the strategy of the static war' waged from January 1952 until the ceasefire in July 1953. Troops from 3 RAR (and later 1 and 2 RAR) were part of the 1st Commonwealth Division (comprising the 28th British Commonwealth; 29th British and Canadian 25th Brigades) that was deployed on the Jamestown Line to defend two pivotal bastions in the approaches to the Imjin Valley, the massive Point 355 Ridge and the Hook.[46] The static war with its fixed defences of trench lines, bunkers, barbed wire and minefields recalled the tactics of the Western Front and of Tobruk. It was methodical warfare with maximum use of supporting arms—including air superiority, artillery and machine guns.[47]

As part of 28th Brigade, the Australians became masters of aggressive patrolling to deny enemy penetration of UN lines. The Australian battalions used multiple small standing patrols in front of the defences at night—particularly in the mouth of gullies and gaps. These were supplemented by fighting patrols and ambush patrols that ranged deeply into no man's land to lie in wait for the enemy. All patrols could call in artillery fire support or assistance from stand-by forces within the line.[48] Between June 1952 and February 1953, the guns of the Commonwealth Division fired some two million shells on the Chinese positions during the static war. This type of fighting was relentless and bloody. In July 1953, only days and hours before the ceasefire, Australian troops took part in fighting around the Hook in which UN artillery fire killed some 3000 Chinese troops.[49]

Australia and the Diplomatic and Military Legacy of the Korean War

The Korean War cost Australia 339 dead, 1216 wounded and twenty-nine prisoners of war most of whom were soldiers.[50] For Australia, Korea provided the model for what Jeffrey Grey has called 'the wars of diplomacy' of the Cold War era of the 1950s and 1960s.[51] These wars embraced the use of limited Australian military involvement in Korea, Malaya, Borneo and later Vietnam as a means of maximising the diplomatic basis of national security. These deployments reflected the realist conviction that, as Spender put it in March 1950, 'a nation's foreign policy must ... be closely integrated with that of defence'. Australian diplomacy must be 'principally and continually concerned with the protection of this country from aggression and with the maintenance of our security and our way of life'.[52]

The integration of Australian diplomacy and strategy began in Korea. Although Australia's military contribution was physically small it had great symbolic and diplomatic value in the negotiations for the ANZUS Pact in 1951—an alliance which has since become the sheet anchor of Australia's security. Conflict in Korea reminded the Menzies Government that the prime danger to Australia's national security lay in Asia. The extension of the American security umbrella to the Asia-Pacific allowed Australia to pursue a strategic policy in which

national security was guaranteed by the United States in a way that did not affect Australia's economic development. This was no mean achievement for a middle power and it set the parameters for foreign policy and defence decision-making until the end of the Vietnam War.[53]

Using this perspective, it is clear that the Korean War was a watershed in Australian history in the sense that it marked the decline of the Anglo-Australian military connection and the maturing of the Australia-US bilateral relationship. This reality was obscured for much of the 1950s by the nature of Australian culture as reflected by Menzies' personal Anglophilia, by the continuing ANZAM connection and by Australia's military assistance to Britain during the Malayan Emergency.[54]

In purely military terms, the Korean War also had a major impact on the development of the Australian Regular Army. Over 7500 troops served in Korea and the conflict gave the Army valuable experience of battalion operations while providing many junior and middle-ranking officers and NCOs with useful combat experience.[55] When the next major test, Vietnam, confronted the Australian Army there were company and battalion commanders available who had learned their craft as platoon leaders in Korea.

The great question, however, remains: was the struggle for South Korea worth the loss of Western life in general and of Australian life in particular?[56] The American combat historian, SLA Marshall, who experienced the two world wars, Korea and Vietnam, once described the Korean conflict as 'the century's nastiest war'.[57] He may have exaggerated but there is little doubt that, in the 1950s to many Australians and Americans, the Korean War seemed to have been a thankless and inglorious task. The fact that the Korean War was a *bellum justum*—the use of force to put down wrongful action—was a poor consolation to those Western soldiers who went home to changing and often indifferent societies that were yet to come to terms with the reality of limited war. As one GI wryly put it, 'we went away to Glenn Miller. We came back to Elvis Presley'.[58]

Yet the war achieved much. As one American scholar has observed, the communist aggression against South Korea was so brazen and threatening that it persuaded the United States to undertake the global role that proved essential to defeat revolutionary Marxism-Leninism.[59] From a post-Cold War perspective we can see clearly now that the Korean War secured ANZUS for Australia; probably saved Taiwan from communism; helped Japan's economic recovery; assisted the morale of the Philippines; and perhaps hastened the Sino-Soviet split.[60] In 1953 little of this was understood in either Australia or the United States. Indeed, the preservation of South Korea under the dictatorship of Syngman Rhee did not seem to have been a great accomplishment. Again with the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that the thriving South Korean state, an Asian Tiger economy, is the direct result of the UN's resistance to aggression in 1950.[61]

Had the UN failed to intervene in Korea in June 1950 the whole of the peninsula would have fallen prey to the dictatorship of Kim Il-sung, the Great Leader, and his strange *juche* (self-reliance) philosophy. There can be no greater contrast in the quality of individual life today than that between Kim Dae-jong's elected government in prosperous South Korea and the sclerotic regime of the Dear Leader, Kim Jong-il, in North Korea with its imbalance between military strength and economic stagnation.[62]

Australian participation in the Korean War, then, did help to save South Korea and this was a noble achievement. Sadly however, the successes of Korea are often overshadowed by the failure of Vietnam. As Max Hastings has noted, Korea is frequently viewed as a military rehearsal for the subsequent American disaster in Vietnam.[63] There can be no doubt that the lessons of Korea were more successfully absorbed by Asian communist revolutionaries than by American strategists. Chinese and Vietnamese military theorists learnt two great military lessons in the Korean conflict. First, they realised the folly of fighting the West on its own terms in major conventional warfare. Accordingly, the war of human waves in Korea gave way to the war of the flea in South-east Asia—that is, Maoist people's war—in which revolutionary subversion was used to foil Western air power; jungle space was employed to blunt Western firepower; and political mobilisation made to substitute for Western industrial mobilisation.[64]

Second, communist strategists recognised the Achilles Heel of Western democracy at war—impatience. The factor of time in war, they reasoned, must always be against democracies in arms. So it was that, when the war in Vietnam began, China—unlike the United States—avoided becoming embroiled in a protracted ground war.[65]

Ironically, all the seeds for American and, by extension, Australian failure in Vietnam were sown in Korea. The problems of supporting local autocrats like Synghman Rhee occurred again in Vietnam with the Thieu government. The ineffectiveness of the ROK Army was repeated with the weak performance of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam. Like MacArthur who underestimated the impact of Chinese arms in Korea, General William Westmoreland underestimated the military skills of his North Vietnamese communist enemy. As in Korea, the difficulties of using air power in a limited war against a peasant army reappeared in Vietnam. Lastly, the strategy of Korea—the employment of firepower attrition—was employed unsuccessfully by Westmoreland in the very different geographical and political conditions of South-east Asia.[66]

In Vietnam, then, all of Australia's diplomatic finesse and combat prowess could not compensate for the flawed strategy of its great ally the United States. The Vietnam experience was a useful, if painful, lesson for Australia's conservative realists in the limitations of alliance security.

Conclusion

The frustrations surrounding the Korean War are sometimes characterised by quoting General Omar N Bradley's famous 1951 statement that the struggle represented 'the wrong war, at the wrong place, at the wrong time, and with the wrong enemy'.[67] It is important to note that Bradley was referring specifically to MacArthur's miscalculation in driving across the 38th Parallel—an action that precipitated China's entry into the war.

By way of contrast, it is interesting to consider General Matthew B Ridgway's December 1950 view of the war in Korea. Ridgway assumed command of UN forces that had been badly mauled and demoralised by the ferocity of the Chinese offensive. As part of his measures to restore morale Ridgway reminded UN troops that the issue at stake in Korea was not about territory but about values and specifically, whether Western values could defeat communist ideology. He went on to state:

> Real estate is here incidental ... The real issues are whether the power of Western civilisation ... shall defy and defeat communism; whether the rule of men who shoot their prisoners, enslave their citizens, and deride the dignity of man, shall displace the rule of those to whom the individual and his individual rights are sacred. The sacrifices we have made, and those we shall yet support, are not offered vicariously for others, but in our own direct defence. In the final analysis, the issue joined right here in Korea is whether communism or individual freedom should prevail.[68]

Only since the end of the Cold War have many in the West come to fully appreciate Ridgway's wise words and to understand that those who fought for South Korea have been, as one Australian newspaper recently put it, 'forgotten heroes'.[69]
It is fitting, then, that the last words on Australia's role in the Korean War should belong to Sir William Keys, a distinguished Korean veteran and a former National President of the Returned Services League. At the dedication of the long-overdue National Korean War Memorial on Anzac Parade in Canberra on 18 April 2000, and only days before his death, Sir William spoke for all Australia's Korean veterans when he said:

> We now have a special memorial to those who served and died in the Korean War. It is an enduring reminder of a most gallant effort. Our greatest memorial, however, will be our contribution to the establishment of a free and democratic, stable, progressive and productive nation in the vital area of North-East Asia that has not only done much for [South] Korea, but so much for the whole region—and so very much for Australia'.[70]

Endnotes

1. James Robert Parish, *The Great Combat Pictures: Twentieth-Century Warfare on the Screen* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc, 1990), 377.
2. Clay Blair, *The Forgotten War: America in Korea, 1950-1953* (New York: Times, 1987).
3. For good general accounts of the Korean War see TR Fehrenbach, *This Kind of War: A Study in Unpreparedness* (New York: Macmillan, 1963); Max Hastings, *The Korean War* (London: Guild Publishing, 1987); Stanley Sandler, *The Korean War: No Victors, No Vanquished* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky Press, 1999); and Michael Hickey, *The Korean War: The West Confronts Communism* (Woodstock, NY: The Overlook Press, 2000).
4. For an exploration of this theme see Frank J Wetta and Stephen J Curley, *Celluloid Wars: A Guide to Film and the American Experience of War* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1992).
5. Quoted in Hastings, *The Korean War*, 249.
6. Quoted in Joseph C Goulden, *Korea: The Untold Story of the War* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1983), xvi.
7. See the official history by Robert O'Neill, *Australia in the Korean War 1950-51* vol II, *Combat Operations* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial and the Australian Government Publishing Service, 1985), Parts Two and Three.
4. *The Sunday Times*, London, 5 September 1952.
9. Robert O'Neill, *Australia in the Korean War 1950-1953*, vol 1, Strategy and Diplomacy (Canberra: Australian War Memorial and the Australian Government Publishing Service, 1981), 29.
10. David Lee and Christopher Waters, eds, *Evatt to Evans: The Labor Tradition in Australian Foreign Policy* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1997).
11. Gareth Evans and Bruce Grant, *Australia's Foreign Relations in the World of the 1990s* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1991), 29-30.
12. In September 1947 Hasluck commented that Evatt's approach represented 'a larrikin strain in Australian foreign policy—a disposition to throw stones at the street lights just because they are bright': Commonwealth of Australia, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives (hereinafter *CPD* [Reps]), vol 193, 24 September 1947, 177.
13. See David Lowe, 'Divining a Labor Line: Conservative Constructions of Labor's Foreign Policy, 1944- 49', in Lee and Waters, eds, *Evatt to Evans*, 65-66.
14. There is no single work on what PA Mediansky has called 'the conservative style in Australian foreign policy'. There is, however, considerable evidence to suggest that such a style has been important in the Liberal-Country/National approach to international relations. See FA Mediansky, 'The Conservative Style in Australian Foreign Policy', Australian Outlook 28:1 (April 1974), 50-56, and Alan Renouf's discussion of the philosophical divisions in Australian foreign policy in Alan Renouf, *The Frightened Country* (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1979), 16-29.
15. Evans and Grant, *Australia's Foreign Relations in the World of the 1990s*, 41-43.
16. David Lee, *Search for Security: The Political Economy of Australia's Postwar Foreign and Defence Policy* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1995), 93.
17. *CPD* (Rcps), vol 201, 15 February 1949, 263-75.
18. Ibid.
19. For an analysis of US and Australian approaches to Asian security in 1949-50 see O'Neill, *Strategy and Diplomacy*, 401-11.
20. Ibid, 405-7.
21. Ibid, 102. See also.TB Millar, 'Australian Defence, 1945-1965', in Gordon Greenwood and Norman Harper, eds, *Australia in World Affairs 1961-1965* (Melbourne: FW Cheshire, 1968), 261-64.
22. Lee, *Search for Security*, 109; 'The National Security Planning and Defence Preparations of the Menzies Government, 1950-1953', *War & Society* 10: 2 (October 1992), 119-38, and 'Australia and Allied Strategy in the Far East, 1952-1957', *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 16: 4 (December 1993), 511-38.
23. See O'Neill, *Strategy and Diplomacy*, chs 6-7, and Lee, *Search for Security*, ch 4.
24. Lee, *Search for Security*, ch 4.
25. *CPD* (Reps), vol 192, 27 September 1950, 16.
26. Menzies broadcast, 22 September 1950, *Current Notes* (1950), vol 21, 664. See also Millar, 'Australian Defence, 1945-1965', 263.
27. *CPD* (Reps), vol 192, 27 September 1950, 18-19.
28. Ibid, p 19.
29. For a view of the role of armies in Korea see Jeffrey Grey, *The Commonwealth Armies and the Korean War: An Alliance Study* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989).
30. Alexander de Seversky, *Victory through Air Power* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1942), 102.
31. O'Neill, *Combat Operations*, 283-85.
32. Ibid,chs 1-4.
33. Lex McAulay, *The Battle of Long Tan: The Legend of Anzac Upheld* (Sydney: Arrow Books, 1987).
34. In the early 1990s the Australian Army recognised the importance of both battles and commissioned monographs by Lieutenant Colonel Bob Breen, *The Battle of Maryang San: 3rd Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment. Korea, 2-8 October 1951* (Sydney: Headquarters Training Command, 1991), and

The Battle of Kapyong: 3rd Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment, Korea, 23-24 April 1951 (Sydney: Headquarters Training Command, 1992). In 1998 the Army published a series of personal recollections by veterans in Maurie Pears and Fred Kirkland, eds, *Korea Remembered: The RAN, ARA and RAAF in the Korean War of 1950-1953* (Sydney: Doctrine Wing, Combined Arms Training and Development Centre, 1998). Other works that recall these battles include Jack Gallaway, *The Last Call of the Bugle: The Long Road to Kapyong* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1994), and Ben O'Dowd, *In Valiant Company: Diggers in Battle—Korea 1950-51* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2000).
35. Foreword by Lieutenant General HJ Coates AO, MBE, Chief of the General Staff, in Breen, *The Battle of Maryang San*, vi.
36. Foreword by Lieutenant General JC Grey AO, Chief of the General Staff, in Breen, *The Battle of Kapyong*, v.
37. The best accounts of the battle can be found in O'Neill, *Combat Operations*, ch 6, and Jeffrey Grey, 'The Regiment's First War: Korea, 1950-1956', in David Horner, ed, *Duty First: The Royal Australian Regiment in War and Peace* (Sydney; Allen & Unwin, 1990), 81-85.
38. Ibid.
39. Foreword by Coates in Breen, *The Battle of Maryang San*, v.
40 . For descriptions of the battle of Maryang San, see O'Neill, *Combat Operations*, ch 8, and Grey, 'The Regiment's First War: Korea, 1950-1956'. 85-86.
41. O'Neill, *Combat Operations*, 184-85.
42. General Sir Francis Hassett AC, MVO, CBE, CB, KBE, MC, 'The Military Team', in Pears and Kirkland, *Korea Remembered*, 51-56.
43. See O'Neill, *Strategy and Diplomacy*, 188-99.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid, 200.
46. Ibid, ch 9. See also Grey, 'The Regiment's First War: Korea 1950-1956', 87-94, and Colin H Brown, *Stalemate in Korea: The Royal Australian Regiment in the Static War of 1952-1953* (Sydney: Australian Military History Publications, 1997).
47. Ibid. See also Ron Hughes, 'The Static War', in Pears and Kirkland, *Korea Remembered*, 189-96.
48. O'Neill, *Combat Operations*, 230-39.
49. Grey, 'The Regiment's First War: Korea, 1950-1956', 92-94.
50. See the Korean War Roll of Honour in 'Forgotten Heroes: Anzac Day Special: Australians in Battle 1950-2000', *The Australian*, 25 April 2000.
51. Jeffrey Grey, *A Military History of Australia* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1990), ch 10.
52. *CPD* (Reps), vol 206, 9 March 1950, 622-23.
53. See O'Neill, *Strategy and Diplomacy*, ch 26.
54. See AW Martin, *Robert Menzies, A Life*, vol 2, 1944-1978 (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1999), chs 11-12 and 15.
55. See Lieutenant General Sir Sydney Rowell KBE, CB, Chief of the General Staff, 'Lessons from Korea', *Australian Army Journal* 9 (September 1953): 5-7, and O'Neill, *Combat Operations*, ch 11.
56. UN Forces suffered 142,000 casualties during the Korean War, the vast majority of which were from the West. For example, the Americans lost 33,269 killed and 105,785 wounded and Australia, Britain, Canada and New Zealand a further 1263 killed and 4817 wounded.
57. Quoted in Hastings, *The Korean War*, 407.
58. Ibid, 409.
59. Peter W Rodman, *More Precious than Peace: The Cold War and the Struggle for the Third World* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1994), 50-51.
60. See the work of such scholars as Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Failure: The Birth and Death of Communism in the Twentieth Century* (London: Macdonald, 1990), and John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).
61. Sandler, *The Korean War: No Victors, No Vanquished*, 263-70.
62. Ibid, ch 14.
63. Hastings, *The Korean War*, xiv.
64. Robert Taber, *The War of the Flea: Guerrilla Warfare Theory and Practice* (London: Paladin, 1970); EL Katzenbach, Jr, 'Time, Space and Will: The Politico-Military Views of Mao Tse-tung', in Lieutenant Colonel TN Green, ed, *The Guerrilla—and How to Fight Him: Selections from the Marine Corps Gazette* (New York: Praeger, 1963), 11-21, and John Colvin, *Volcano Under Snow: Vo Nguyen Giap* (London: Quartet Books, 1996).
65. For the Korean War's impact on the conflict in Vietnam, see Sandler, *The Korean War: No Victors, No Vanquished*, 263-70.
66. Ibid. See also Hastings, *The Korean War*, ch 18.
67. Quoted by Martin Blumenson, 'Remembering the Korean War', *Army*, May 1997, 54.
68. Quoted in Sandler, *The Korean War: No Victors, No Vanquished*, 132.
69. 'Forgotten Heroes: Anzac Day Special: Australians in Battle, 1950-2000', *The Australian* 25 April 2000.
70. For the full text of this speech see Sir William Keys AC, OBE, MC, 'Memories of Korea', *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute of Australia* 21 (June 2000): 10.