

American and Allied Forces in Korea, 1943-1958

Purpose

This exhibit documents how the Korean War began, was prosecuted, and ended by illustrating mail of American and allied forces. Covers and maps show how the war evolved by relating covers to key battles and their outcomes. The exhibit honors the deaths of nearly 40,000 Americans, 540,000 military casualties, and more than 2.5 million civilians from South Korea and United Nations allies.

Organization and Scope

Forces mail begins with the establishment of a U.S. Military Government in Korea in 1943. Covers are shown chronologically. Key battles are presented within distinct combat phases as defined by U.S. Dept. of Defense historians. Within each phase, covers are supplemented by force-situation maps, press photos where applicable. Covers from ten U.S. allies are included, as well as covers from non-combatants Portugal, Switzerland, Sweden, and Turkey.

Exhibit Plan

21 Oct 43 - 3 Oct 45:	WWII Japanese prisoners held in Keijo-Chosen POW camp in Korea.
4 Sep 45 - 24 Jun 50:	US/UN forces control south of the 38th parallel following Japan's surrender.
25 Jun 50 - 15 Sep 50:	Communist forces invade, collapsing US forces to a perimeter around Pusan.
16 Sep 50 - 25 Oct 50:	Landing at Inchon; ROK forces cross 38th parallel, push toward the Yalu River.
26 Oct 50 - 15 Jan 51:	Chinese forces cross the Yalu, push southward, retreat, then attack in force.
16 Jan 51 - 31 Mar 51:	General Ridgway pushes communist forces back across the 38th parallel.
1 Apr 51 - 7 Jul 53:	Stalemate at the 38th parallel; two million more people die before the armistice.
8 Jul 53 - 31 Mar 58:	Aftermath of American unreleased POWs held in contravention of the armistice.

Covers are arranged based on the combat phase in which letters were sent or received. Within each phase they are arranged by military action, not necessarily by date, as most mail was sent in the days following a battle. All photographs are original, taken by the U.S. Army and the U.S. Marine Corps, with handstamp dates on the reverse. Rarest covers are framed in **RED**. Covers to or from soldiers killed in action are framed in **BLACK**.

Historical Background

Japan had brutally enslaved Koreans since the late 16th Century. After the Korean Empire was proclaimed in 1897, Japan remained aggressive and formally annexed Korea in 1916. Japanese rule ended on 15 August 1945 with its loss in WWII. Surrender terms required that armed forces of the US and USSR would occupy the Korean Peninsula—Russia north of the 38th parallel, the United States south of it. Governance of North Korea would be by the Soviet Civil Administration, in South Korea by the United States Military Government in Korea (USMGIC). To support USMGIC, XXIV Corps of the U.S. Tenth Army, under command of Gen. John Hodge, landed at Inchon on 8 September 1945 to establish a government.

The Korean War spanned 38 months and was among the most destructive conflicts of the modern era, with about three million people killed - a larger proportional civilian death toll than in either World War II or the Vietnam War. Virtually all of Korea's major cities were destroyed, and North Korea was among the most heavily bombed countries in history.

The exhibit begins with the 1943 and 1945 strategic conferences, at Cairo and Yalta, where the US, the UK and China declared that Japan would be stripped of all seized territories, and that Korea would be partitioned by the 38th parallel. Chinese territories would be restored to the Republic of China, and Korea would become a free and independent nation. It ends in 1958 – four years after with the 1954 armistice. [The Korean War has still not officially ended.](#)

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Synopsis: American and Allied Forces in Korea, 1943-1958

Purpose and Scope: The exhibit explains how the war began, was prosecuted, and ended in stalemate after 540,000 military casualties and the deaths of 2.5 million+ civilians.

Exhibit Plan: Chapters comprise six phases of the war, as defined by military historians.

Major Items and Rarity: Highlights key pieces, frame locations, and a clear explanation of why specific items are scarce.

One of the earliest MIA Letters in the war: frame 1 p. 7

One of first Killed in-Action letters to be sent home: frame1, p. 9

First amphibious landing of the war: frame 2, p. 23

Cover from Four-Star General Ridgway: frame 3, p. 23

Earliest cover from a POW camp in China: frame 4, p. 24

Earliest North Korean date stamp on POW mail: Frame 4, p. 30

Cover from Maj Gen O.P. Smith after the fiasco at the Chosin Reservoir; frame 4, p. 29

Covers from Great Britain, Columbia, Philippines & Austral. mails: frame 5 , p. 34, 36, 37

Covers from Chinese prison camps: frame 5, p. 41

Four-page letter, with cover, from North Korean POW Camp 3, frame 5, p. 44

Covers from allies Australia & New Zealand: frame 5, p. 45

Very rare cover from allied Turkey: frame 5, p. 49

First sailing from Inchon with American returnees: frame 7, p. 56

Covers from allies Canada and Australia on Cease-Fire Day: frame 8, p. 51

Covers from allies Switzerland, Puerto-Rico and Sweden: Frame 8, p. 52-54

Personal Research: Every cover was examined with regard to where it was written and under what circumstances, using the references shown below.

Reference Bibliography: Five-volume *U.S. Army in the Korean War*, and five-volume *U.S. Marine Operations in Korea*, as well as dozens of online home-town newspaper archives.

Date: This synopsis covers all the personal research up until 31 July 2026.

Exhibit Class: Postal History.