

Understanding The History of the Korean War (1950-1953)

Who and What Should One Remember on Remembrance Day?

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Region: [Canada](#)

Theme: [History](#)

Education is supposed to encourage critical thinking. However, if critical thinking ever were a part of the education curriculum, it usually goes out the window around Remembrance Day.

Take, for instance, *Canada Remembers Times* the Veterans' Week Special Edition (5-11 November 2020). It is published by Veterans Affairs Canada and made available in BC provincial elementary schools. On page one an article caught my eye: "Going to War in Korea."

The article relates:

The Korean War erupted 70 years ago when the North Korean troops poured across the border into South Korea on 25 June 1950.... More than 26,000 Canadians traveled halfway around the world to fight with the United Nations forces...

There is no background to the article, and there is no supporting evidence for the information given. For example, readers are not apprised that the UN Security Council was able to vote for sending troops to Korea because the USSR did not partake in order to show solidarity with the bid of the People's Republic of China to hold the UNSC China seat (instead of the Republic of China, aka Taiwan). It seems that an essential piece of information was omitted, and that poses a question mark to the validity and morality of Canada joining UN forces in a military venture that is strikingly at odds with the UN's expressed *raison d'être* of preventing the scourge of war.

In western state/corporate media the question of who started the war on the Korean peninsula is given as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. If one is curious enough to seek out what the DRPK side or independent media says, then a different answer might be forthcoming. Pyongyang states that there were several Republic of Korea troop incursions into the North preceding the DPRK invasion that began on 25 June 1950. [1],[2]

Regardless of whether the North or the South had initiated militarism on the peninsula, what is not discussed is the question of what gave the US and the UN the moral right to become involved in what was initially a civil war?

Who started the war on the Korean peninsula is relevant. But the far more important question is *what* caused the war? The *what* in this case would seem to

answer the question of *who*.

At the end of WWII, Japan was defeated, and it would have had to end its colonization of Korea which began in 1910. Left out of many accounts is the Taft-Katsura Agreement, essentially a *quid pro quo* imperialism where the US left Korea to Japan and Japan left the Philippines to the US. [3]

This would all change shortly after the end of WWII.

Yo Un Hyung was a politician, well regarded in both the ROK and the DPRK, who had vigorously opposed the Japanese occupation of Korea. At the end of WWII, Yo was handed the reins of self-government in Korea by the Japanese governor general of Korea, general Abe Endo. Yo helped form People's Committees in all Korean provinces and the Korean People's Republic arose. On 14 September 1945, the first cabinet was formed. [4]

The US, however, feared a socialist state in Korea. The US dismantled and abolished the fledgling democratic Korean People's Republic. Vice president Yo was forced to step down, as the United States Army Military Government in Korea consolidated its occupation of the South.

As a consequence, the division imposed by the US created a situation in which the Korean people would seek to unite the two sides of the peninsula. The unpopular US-installed government in the south rapidly fell to the northern forces who were supported by socialist sympathizers in the south and aided by desertions from the ROK forces. The peninsula, aside from a pocket in Busan, was militarily captured by northern fighters. Thus the US intervened.

Writes author Nihal Esso,

If the issue of [governance] had been left to the Korean people themselves to decide, all of Korea would have been united under the leadership of the North, long recognized by the Socialist Bloc (and at that time, much of the Korean and world populations) as the sole legitimate government on the peninsula. [5]

Korea expert Bruce Cumings argued: "it is the Americans who bear the lion's share of the responsibility for the thirty-eighth parallel." [6]

Countries of ethnically similar people that are split up by outside actors tend to want to rejoin. In recent history there are the examples of North and South Viet Nam as well as East and West Germany reuniting. The US had a hand in the partitioning of Viet Nam, Germany, and Korea. It is only matter of time before some form of reunification happens between the DPRK and ROK.

Thus it is *prima facie* evident that the US bears responsibility for instigating the war on the Korean peninsula. If the US had not forced a division of the Korean peninsula, there would not have been a burning desire to reunite what was not separated.

So why is Veterans Affairs Canada pushing this hawkish narrative? Is it ignorance? Is it subservience to the US? When it comes to wars and warring, what is the narrative a

government (in this case the Canadian government) should be presenting in schools? Should not governments promote a narrative that peace is the path to be followed?

I do recognize that many of the people who fought in the wars, fought out of bravery and the conviction that they were fighting for a noble cause. That Remembrance Day recognizes the past sacrifice of men and women who fought for, what they believed to be, a good cause is respectful. But a more important and respectful use of such a holiday is to lay bare the fact that warring is a dirty, violent business that has no place in a moral universe. Governments that believe in the sanctity of human life must strive to prevent the scourge of war. But governments misuse Remembrance Day. Thus Remembrance Day comes packaged with patriotism, propaganda, and disinformation.

The research of professor Jacques Pauwels reveals that World War One and World War Two were fought for ignoble reasons. [7] Pauwels writes that WWI was antagonistic to the working class, hindering workers from organizing, receiving higher wages, and demanding greater democracy. The Establishment hoped that WWI would destroy revolutionary zeal, democratic aspirations, and the desire for socialism. As for WWII, Pauwels argues that the United States' participation was again based mainly on the economic and business interests of US corporations.

If Pauwels' etiology of WWI and WWII is correct, and I believe it is, then shouldn't the extirpation of the elaborate propaganda and disinformation architecture that helps to foment wars be priority number one? Is the celebration of the individual acts of certain soldiers to be accorded greater attention than the millions upon millions of people killed, the cities leveled, and the resulting immiseration? Would people sacrifice their lives and take the lives of others knowing beforehand that wars are fought for corporate profiteering?

Governments must be truthful and forthright about the scourge of war, and the men and women have an ethical obligation to become deeply familiar with what war is and what the moral implications are before they take up arms. Some soldiers may well be heroes, but many are killers and war criminals. Right now a man is incarcerated in the ill-reputed Belmarsh Prison in London because he helped to expose the war crimes of Americans. Julian Assange is a genuine hero, but the governments of today, and the state/corporate media prefer that he be dropped down the Memory Hole. One day, however, it is the heroes of peace, people like Julian Assange, who will be remembered and celebrated on this day.

The physicist Albert Einstein identified how simple it is to bring an end to warring: "I am not only a pacifist but a militant pacifist. I am willing to fight for peace. Nothing will end war unless the people themselves refuse to go to war." [8] In other words, to some extent, the people who continue to enlist and put their bodies on the line for what their government deems to be a good cause are guilty of perpetuating war. Remembrance Day and its annual propaganda trumpets battlefield heroism and desensitizes people to the bloody carnage.

To target such propaganda at young children is condemnatory.

Yet, such propaganda is presented within the school system to impressionable young minds, minds that haven't fully developed the intellectual tools to evaluate the verisimilitude of information. [9]

Is it any wonder that Mark Twain [said](#), "Education consists mainly in what we have unlearned."

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Notes

1. See Won Myong Uk and Kim Hak Chol, *Distortion of US Provocation of Korean War* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 2003).
2. See Ho Jong Ho, Kang Sok Hui, and Pak Thae Ho, *The US Imperialists Started the Korean War* (Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1993).
3. See Carole Cameron Shaw, *The Foreign Destruction of Korean Independence* (Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 2007).
4. Lee Wha Rang, "[Who was Yo Un-hyung? \(Part 2\)](#)," *Association for Asian Research*, 1 March 2004.
5. Nhial Ezzo, *What You Don't Know about North Korea Could Fill a Book* (Intransitive Publishers International, 2013): 21%.
6. Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2005): 186.
7. See Jacques R. Pauwels, *The Great Class War 1914-1918* (Lorimer, 2016) and *The Myth of the Good War: America in the Second World War*, Lorimer, second edition, 2015).
8. Einstein from an interview with George Sylvester Viereck, January 1931.
9. The child development psychologist Jean Piaget considered higher level reasoning occurs during the formal operational stage of development, at approximately age twelve, although not everyone achieves this stage of cognitive development. The psychologist Lev Vygotsky promoted guided discovery in the classroom for problems beyond a child's level of understanding.

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