AN INSTRUCTIONAL MODULE

compiled for the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission and the Pennsylvania Military Museum, Boalsburg, PA.

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The years immediately following the end of World War II were a time of changes throughout the world. Europe was being rebuilt under the Marshall Plan, and Japan was being rebuilt under Gen. Douglas MacArthur’s direction.

Two countries, the United States and the Soviet Union, emerged as “superpowers” after the war. The United Nations (U.N.) formed in 1945, with the hope that it could solve future problems between nations peacefully. America and its European allies formed the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to counter a Soviet threat.

In America, the “baby boom” was in full swing, as returning G.I.s started families. Many of the World War II veterans also took advantage of the G.I. Bill, which enabled them to go to college and build homes. Many of these homes were being built in the expanding suburbs, and people began to move out of the big cities in large numbers. However, not all of the soldiers came home right away. The Army kept troops in Europe to occupy Germany and to prevent a feared Soviet attack. The U.S. also kept large numbers of troops in Japan. For the most part, this occupation duty was easy and soldiers did not do much training. In addition, many units of the armed forces were under strength and under-equipped, and the loss of discharged combat veterans hurt their fighting ability. This would prove costly when hostilities in Korea began.

The United States produced over half of the manufactured goods in the world during this time. In 1948, President Harry Truman desegregated the military as well. This meant that for the
first time white and African American soldiers would serve side by side in racially mixed units. Some people thought that white and African American soldiers would not be able to fight effectively in mixed units. However, events in Korea would prove them wrong.

Elsewhere in the world, most of Eastern Europe was under Soviet influence. Communist forces gained ground in China as well. The spread of communism led to a fear of a “Red Menace,” and a communist takeover of the world. In Vietnam, the French took over control of the country, which had been a French colony prior to World War II. The communist Viet Minh began a guerilla war against the French soon after. The takeover of Eastern Europe caused tensions between the Soviet Union and the western allies to grow. The Soviets denied the peoples of Eastern Europe many of the freedoms that are taken for granted today, including the right to vote in free elections, the freedom of speech, and freedom to work for yourself and own property. Winston Churchill, the former Prime Minister of Great Britain, said in a famous speech about the Soviet takeover of Eastern Europe that, “An iron curtain has descended across the Continent.”

In 1949, the Soviet Union announced that it also had nuclear bombs, touching off the “cold war” (or a period of tension and conflict between the Soviet Union and its allies and the United States and its allies that stopped short of actual armed fighting) and fears of a worldwide nuclear war grew. People became so afraid that children learned how to react to a Soviet nuclear attack and schools held “duck and cover” drills just like the fire drills you do today. People also began to build bomb shelters in store basements, or even in their backyards!

The custom of calling Communists “reds” goes back to the Russian Revolution. The communist forces fought under a red banner. Communism is a system of government in which the state plans and controls the economy and a single - often authoritarian - party holds absolute power; private ownership of property is banned; and progress is supposedly made towards a classless society.

“Duck and Cover” drills taught school children to climb under their desks and cover their eyes and head if a nuclear bomb was detonated.
Trouble In Korea

The Korean War had its roots in the Second World War. During WWII, Japan annexed Korea. The United States, Great Britain, China, and the U.S.S.R. agreed that Korea would be made independent following Japan’s defeat. After the war’s end, the United States suggested that the Soviet Union take temporary control of the northern part of Korea while the south was administered by the U.S. This North-South division of the country was intended to be a temporary condition, which would end once Korea was on the road to independence. The Soviet Union, however, seized the opportunity to bring the northern portion of the country under Communist influence.

The U.S. requested that the United Nations intervene, and despite Soviet objections, the U.N. declared that general elections be held and that a unified government be formed. The U.N. also declared that a security force would be sent to Korea after the elections.

North Korean Communists, who were trained and encouraged by the Soviets, prevented a U.N. commission from holding elections in the north. Despite this resistance, South Korea held elections, and the Republic of Korea formed. The U.N. recognized the Republic as Korea’s legitimate government. The Soviets quickly formed their own rival government, the People’s Democratic Republic of Korea. The Soviets pledged to withdraw troops from the North, and the U.S. pledged to do the same in the South. By 1949, the U.S. had completed its withdrawal, leaving behind only a small group of military advisors. The Soviets, however, continued to secretly train and equip a North Korean army.
America in the late 1940s experienced a time of change. After WWII, manufacturers switched from making tanks and bombers to making consumer goods such as automobiles and refrigerators. These goods were in high demand, because many people were deprived of them during the Depression and the war. Pennsylvania’s factories provided a lot of the raw materials, such as steel, that were used in making these products. The U.S. economy showed no signs of slowing down.

One thing that changed American life in a big way was television. Although it had been around for years, in the late 1940s, television became affordable to most Americans. The television would replace the radio as the main form of home entertainment for Americans. Some of the more popular programs were comedies, westerns, and game and variety shows like The Ed Sullivan Show. In 1954, a Pittsburgh TV station became the first to broadcast commercial-free educational programs. WQED, although not the first of what we now call Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) stations, was the first TV station to be owned by the community and was an early pioneer in educational programming.

Another phenomenon that changed American life was rock ‘n’ roll. In the early 1950s, rock music came onto the scene, and performers such as Elvis Presley and Bill Haley and the Comets became overnight sensations. Screaming fans packed their concerts, and radio stations began to switch from big band and jazz music to play the rock music that America’s youth were crazy about. Television shows such as American Bandstand, which was produced in Philadelphia, showcased these new artists. However, the parents of America’s teenagers weren’t too happy about the arrival of this new music, as this new form of music was associated with teen rebellion, contained suggestive lyrics, and provoked wild responses from teens!
Everything in America during this time was not all fun and games, however. Racial segregation still existed in the U.S. Even though African Americans in the South experienced legal segregation, President Truman recognized their contributions to the armed forces and desegregated the military.

Pennsylvania experienced a post war “boom” during this time, too. The tremendous demand for manufactured goods, and the housing boom in particular, helped to place Pennsylvania first, or close to first, in the nation in the production of steel, iron, and cement. Pennsylvania also out-paced many of the other states in the production of chemicals, textiles, and even food. All of this activity provided jobs to the returning veterans of WWII who got jobs, married and started families.

The American economy was strong and Pennsylvania was a big part of this. The average salary for a worker in the U.S. in 1948 was a whopping $2,950! Although this does not seem like very much by today’s standards, gasoline cost $.16 a gallon, bacon $.59 a pound, hamburger meat $.45 a pound, movie tickets $.60, the average new house $7,700, and a new car $1,250. All of these prosperous new families needed places to live. This demand helped fuel the rapid growth of suburbia. In 1951 work began on the first planned community in the United States at Levittown, Pennsylvania. This town, built by Abraham Levitt, featured mass-produced single family homes, churches, schools, and shopping centers. Although these planned towns and mass market houses drew criticism, they started a trend in modern housing that is still with us today.

As the suburbs flourished, manufacturers moved their plants out of the cities and closer to the expanding suburbs. When these jobs moved out of the cities, the economies of these cities were hurt, and they started to decline. At this time, Pennsylvania and the federal government also continued to expand the Pennsylvania Turnpike which, by 1957, would stretch across the state from New Jersey to Ohio.

When the Korean conflict broke out, Pennsylvania would once again find itself as a crucial part of the war effort. Its manufacturing plants would be called upon to help produce goods needed to fight the war, and many of its reservists and Guardsmen would be called to duty.
On June 25, 1950, after obtaining permission from Soviet leader Josef Stalin, North Korean forces crossed the 38th parallel, starting the Korean War. U.S. President Harry Truman found himself in a difficult position. On one hand, he felt obligated to help the South Koreans and to try to contain communist expansion. On the other hand, he felt it important to prevent the war from spreading and involving the Chinese and Soviets. Truman took his case for intervention in the war to the U.N. Luckily, the Soviet delegation had been boycotting U.N. meetings since January and weren’t there to stop the vote in June 1950 authorizing military intervention to defend the South. If they had been present, they would have certainly vetoed the “yes” vote and the U.N. would have stayed out of the war. As it was, the U.N. did step in and asked its members to send military help to South Korea.

The Course of the War

The North Korean invasion initially overwhelmed the South Koreans, who started to retreat. The North Koreans thought that they would quickly defeat the South, but the South Koreans fought back harder than expected. This helped to buy time to allow U.N. forces to make it to Korea. These forces, many of which were American troops occupying Japan, were ill-
prepared for the fighting since they were not adequately equipped or trained. The North Koreans captured South Korea’s capital city of Seoul, and it looked as if they would win the war. North Korean forces pushed American and South Korean troops, led by General Walton Walker, into a small part of southeastern Korea, known as the “Pusan Perimeter.” Although U.N. troops were spread thin and supplies often low, they fought back ferociously and stopped the North Korean advance. The U.S. then launched an invasion from the sea at Inchon, behind the North Korean lines, and started to drive the North Koreans back towards the Chinese border. During this phase of the war, U.S. troops cut off many North Korean soldiers deep inside South Korea and captured them. As the U.N. forces got closer to the Chinese border, the Chinese saw this as a threat, and launched a massive surprise attack that threw the U.N. forces into retreat. Things got worse for the U.N. troops when Eighth Army commander, Walton Walker, was killed in jeep accident.

General Douglas MacArthur, overall commander in the Far East, assigned General Matthew Ridgeway to take over for Walker. Ridgeway quickly turned things around and began to attack the Chinese and he slowly gained ground. At this point, Douglas MacArthur advocated using nuclear weapons to stop the Chinese. President Truman felt otherwise and, after a public disagreement over policy, fired MacArthur and replaced him with Ridgeway. Ridgeway continued to retake South Korea, and after a series of battles, both sides settled into a stalemate, with neither side having the advantage. Trenches and bunkers were dug into the hills and mountains, and the fighting continued for almost two years before an armistice was signed in 1953.
A Difficult War to Fight

The fight in Korea was a very difficult one for the soldiers on both sides. Korea’s terrain was covered with numerous mountains, ridges, valleys, and hills. There were very few paved roads on which to move men and equipment. The weather in Korea was also difficult for the soldiers. The weather in the summer months was hot and humid, and the winter months were bitter cold. Wet, foul-smelling rice paddies were another feature that troubled U.S. troops. The mud and water made walking difficult and often hid booby traps. In the winter, the freezing water soaked the soldiers and made them miserable.

Korea’s terrain prevented either side from using large groups of tanks, so the majority of the fighting was done using artillery and infantry. North Korean and Chinese “volunteers” (actually drafted Chinese soldiers whose government told them they were fighting in China, not Korea) often launched “human wave” assaults and used bugles to strike fear into American soldiers. Once the lines stabilized, the war started to look a lot like the trench warfare of World War I, with men on both sides in trenches and bunkers.

The many hills and ridges were natural obstacles that, when fortified, became difficult to overcome. The extremely cold winters, hot summers, steep hills, harsh terrain, and the confusion about American goals during the war, made life for the soldiers very difficult. By 1952, it was becoming clear to the soldiers that the United States was not interested in complete victory like that achieved in WWII.

Despite the fact that Korea was a U.N. operation, the United States provided the majority of forces used in the war.

After WWII, the government discharged soldiers using the “points system.” A number of points were assigned for length of service, medals received, and other things. The higher the points, the sooner you were discharged. This policy had the side effect of robbing the Army of experienced soldiers.

The Battle of the Chosin Reservoir, which pitted U.S. Marines and Army troops against North Korean and Chinese troops, occurred in subzero winter conditions. Marines who fought there soon called it the “Frozen Chosin.”
Mobilizing for War

When World War II ended, the armed forces began to demobilize. The government discharged large numbers of troops and “mothballed,” or put into storage, a great amount of equipment. The Army kept troops in Europe to occupy Germany and to prevent a feared Soviet attack. The U.S. also kept large numbers of troops in Japan. Many units of the armed forces were under strength and under-equipped, and the loss of discharged combat veterans hurt their fighting ability. Occupation duty was generally lax, and not much training was done. This would help make U.S. soldiers unprepared for the hardships of combat when war broke out in Korea.

When the war in Korea broke out, the closest U.S. troops were stationed in Japan. They were hurriedly sent to Korea to halt the North Korean attack and were forced to fight without much assistance from other allies who had pledged support to the U.N. This was because many of these countries had suffered greatly during World War II and could not afford to send much assistance. This forced the U.S. to shoulder the burden of the war.

The U.S. needed manpower quickly to fight the war, so Congress re-instituted the draft and began to call up the reserve forces. Many of these reserve forces were World War II vets from the inactive reserves, and they were used to replace combat losses. Most of the active reserve units were kept on standby or were sent to Europe in case of a Soviet attack.

Pennsylvania’s 28th Infantry Division was activated and assigned to serve in Europe, to guard against a possible Soviet attack. A tragic accident occurred when some of the division’s soldiers belonging to the 109th Field Artillery were traveling by train to their training camps in
Indiana. The train they were on was struck by a cargo train and derailed, causing the deaths of 33 soldiers and wounding hundreds. The unit never deployed to Korea.

Although the 28th Division did not serve in Korea, many thousands of Pennsylvanians did. As in previous wars, Pennsylvania citizens provided more troops than most of the other states. Pennsylvania factories also provided large amounts of materials for the war effort.

Transporting the men and materials needed to fight in Korea was a difficult task. Korea was thousands of miles away, and the supplies and troops had to be moved by boat, which often took weeks. In the early part of the war, U.S. units that were in nearby Japan were quickly sent to Korea, even though they lacked equipment, and were short of soldiers.

Another problem facing the soldiers fighting in Korea was that the United States was unprepared to fight the war in Korea. America rapidly demobilized after WWII, and military leaders prepared to fight a nuclear war where troops and tanks would not be necessary. As a result, many of the divisions were not at full strength, and their equipment was not always available or in good condition. These problems had to be overcome quickly.

During the Korean conflict, 9 Pennsylvanians received the Medal of Honor, the nation's highest award for bravery. That's more than any other state.
The Home Front

After WWII, Americans were eager to get on with life without warfare and rationing. The GI's returned to civilian jobs and began to raise families. Thoughts of war were far from anyone's mind. Americans were shocked when a new war broke out in a far away and strange Asian country called Korea. Fear of worldwide nuclear war began when the Soviets announced that they had produced an atomic bomb. This started the "arms race," in which the United States and the Soviet Union each tried to build more nuclear weapons than the other, giving the winner a tactical advantage. The fear of atomic attack was very real for many people. They built bomb shelters in their backyards, and schoolchildren practiced "duck and cover drills."

The "Red Scare" also affected the lives of Americans in this period. It was thought that the Communists were trying to take over the world and would try to make America a communist state. Communist agents were thought to be in America trying to undermine the country. U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy claimed that there were hundreds of communists working in the State Department and eventually claimed that communists had taken over Hollywood. He called for hearings to be held, and many people’s lives and careers were ruined when they were accused of being communists or when they refused to cooperate with Congress. Although many people thought that McCarthy launched a communist "witch hunt," later documents proved hundreds of

Senator Joseph McCarthy
communist spies had worked their way into the U.S. government and many of the actors admitted to being members of the Communist Party during the 1930s and 1940s. Some people, mainly actors and writers were blacklisted and could not find work for many years. Burgess Meredith, the actor who played Rocky Balboa’s trainer in the very popular Rocky movies, was one of the many actors accused of being a communist. Meredith was one of the few actors who eventually recovered his career after being blacklisted. Other people you may know of cooperated fully. Actors like Ronald Reagan shared information about suspect actors with the FBI, while politicians like Richard Nixon gained fame working on Committees set up by Congress to uncover communists and communist plots.

Fears of a communist takeover of the world and of nuclear war increased when North Korean Communists invaded South Korea and started the Korean War. With America at war once again, the industry had to mobilize and begin producing equipment needed for the front, even though they didn’t stop making civilian cars and TVs like they did in WWII. Because the war came as a surprise and was limited in size (and because it often took two years to produce complex war supplies) most equipment used in the first few years of the war was left over from WWII. The demands of the war in Korea and the decision to expand the Army to counter the Soviet Union around the world caused shortages and rising prices of consumer goods. The American economy became unstable and weak. This only added to the unpopularity of the Korean War on the home front. President Truman eventually stabilized the economy, but only by imposing tight price controls like that of WWII. Although many Americans didn’t realize it, the Korean War sparked a massive change in the American military. The military committed itself to improving and expanding its forces to fight a long Cold War.
The Korean War era was a time of great progress in technology and quality of life. Many inventions made life safer and easier for Americans, and many of these products were exported around the world. Television was certainly one of the more significant innovations. Rather, we should say affordable televisions, since the TV had been around since the ‘30s. Many homes would eventually have TV sets (most were black and white screens). Color TV broadcasts started in 1953. The remote control was invented in 1950 by Zenith Corp.

America’s love affair with the automobile continued in the 1940s and 1950s. Driving became a little easier when power steering was invented by Chrysler. Radial tires and radios helped make the driving experience more comfortable as well. The field of electronics received an important boost in 1949 when the transistor was invented. Transistors enabled electronic devices to be built in smaller sizes, paving the way for portable radios and other devices.

Cooking in the kitchen became a lot easier for Americans in the 1950s. Instant iced tea, Saran Wrap, and non stick frying pans all were invented in the fifties. The kitchen even became more pleasing to the eye when General Electric produced the first color appliances in 1954. Until that time, all appliances were available only in white.

Medical science made many important advances in this period as well. The polio vaccine, which was discovered by a Pittsburgh doctor, saved many children’s lives. The heart lung
machine allowed life support to be used during critical operations. The first kidney transplant was performed as well.

The Korean War also introduced several military innovations. For the first time, armies utilized helicopters in large numbers to transport men and materiel rapidly, bypassing rugged terrain. Helicopters frequently transported wounded men. Another military first for the Korean War was the first aerial dogfight between opposing jet fighters. In fact, the North Koreans used jets obtained from the Soviet Union first, and the Americans had to scramble to get their own jets over to Korea. The air war also saw a secret war between American pilots and Soviet pilots. Officially, the Soviet Union was not involved in the war.

The extremely cold winter weather (temperatures routinely reached 25-30 degrees below zero) in Korea forced the military to adapt. In the first harsh winter of the war over 5,300 servicemen suffered the effects of frostbite. The military was not used to seeing frostbite in numbers so large, and doctors scrambled to find ways of treating the victims. These doctors developed new frostbite treatments that saved many of the

Helicopters often took wounded soldiers to mobile hospitals called MASH units (this stood for Mobile Army Surgical Hospital). You may be familiar with the very popular TV show of the same name that ran from 1972-1983 and whose reruns can still be seen today.

A seemingly endless line of South Korean refugees as they trek through subzero temperatures.
unfortunate soldiers from having to undergo painful amputations. The military also realized the need to develop and issue new cold weather gear to prevent frostbite and other cold weather injuries. However, the military was not always so good in developing new cold weather equipment. One failed attempt was the development of cold weather boots were “shoe packs.” Although the military designed the shoe packs to keep soldier’s feet dry and warm, they failed miserably. They tended to make the feet sweat which made the effects of the weather worse. Through trial and error, the military eventually produced effective new clothes and cold weather boots to help the soldiers survive.

The most important new invention may have been the Extreme Cold Weather Clothing System (known as ECWCS) which included long underwear, long overcoat, gloves, cold weather footwear known as “Mickey Mouse” boots, and hat. The ECWCS is still in use today in a more modern form.

The late 1940s and early 1950s saw many inventions and innovations that had far reaching and long lasting effects. They helped to make America and the rest of the world a safer and often more convenient place to live in.
The Korean War era was a confusing time for Americans. It was a time of growth and prosperity. Great progress was made towards making life better for Americans. The good times that many had worked so long and hard for seemed to be here to stay.

The peace and prosperity that followed World War II was shattered by the undeclared war in Korea, and the fear of Soviet aggression in Europe and around the world. America was drawn into fighting a costly war that had one goal: stopping the spread of Communism. The Korean War confused many Americans. American soldiers went to a far-away land to fight Communists in a conflict that never was declared a war.

To make matters worse, officially the Korean War has not ever ended. Both sides agreed to an Armistice, which was a formal agreement that they would stop shooting at each other, but the issues that caused the war remained. When the fighting ended, however, North Korea remained a
communist country. Korea remains divided to this day. Many Americans felt that the sacrifices made had been for nothing. In fact, the only real change of the war was the boundary line tilting several degrees.

With Korea as its starting point, the US foreign policy was guided to stop the spread of Communism. The arms race was accelerated, and the Cold War would occasionally show signs that it was about to become hotter. This policy would lead America into its longest and most frustrating war a decade after Korea ended in a stalemate. The Geneva Conference of 1954 declared an uneasy truce in Korea in April of that year. The truce ceased the actual fire between combatants but stopped short of concluding peace, leaving a situation that remains today. Incidentally, this Geneva Conference also divided a little known and far-away country called Vietnam into North and South Vietnam along the 17th parallel. The seeds of the next conflict in Asia were already sown.

7,699 Pennsylvanians lost their lives in the Korean War. A total of 36,576 Americans were killed in Korea. Until recently it was thought that over 50,000 died in Korea, but it was shown that deaths that occurred outside of Korea during this time were mistakenly included.