CLIMATE VANGUARD

Korean War

25th June 1950 – 27th July 1953



Image: *History.com*

CV CLIMATE VANGUARD



On this day in 1950, war broke out between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the Republic of Korea (ROK).*

The Korean War was a civil war over the future of a unified Korea. On the one side, the DPRK fought with the masses for a socialist Korea, while on the other side, the US-backed ROK fought for a capitalist Korea allied with Western imperialism.

***Note:** The DPRK is typically referred to as 'North Korea' and the ROK as 'South Korea.'

***Source:** Hart-Landsberg, Korea (1998). **Image:** DPRK soldiers in action.*



World War II

Prior to the Korean war, the Korean peninsula was under Japanese colonial occupation. To aid its World War II effort, Japan conscripted millions of Koreans into combat and forced labour.

It also forced hundreds of thousands of Korean girls and young women into sex slavery as “comfort women” for Japanese soldiers.

Source: *Nodutol, Korea Education Toolkit; Lee, Comfort Women Justice Coalition (2016).*
Image: *Japanese soldiers attacking Yeongjong Island in 1875.*

CLIMATE VANGUARD

Partition of Korea

After Japan surrendered in August 1945, the forces of national liberation surged in Korea.

People's committees were set up across the country, acting as basic units of government. Workers took over Japanese companies and peasants reclaimed their land. On September 6th, 1945, the Korean People's Republic was officially established.

Meanwhile, with the Soviets poised to reach Korea first, the US issued a unilateral order to divide Korea along the 38th parallel, putting the North under Soviet control and the South under US control.



Source: *Hart-Landsberg, Korea (1998).*

CLIMATE VANGUARD



In the North, the Soviets granted significant political authority to the people's committees and eradicated Japan's colonial presence. The Soviets oversaw the implementation of popular reforms, including land redistribution, nationalisation, and guaranteeing women's rights.

Meanwhile, in the South, the US occupation regime quickly enlisted Japanese colonial forces and crushed the Korean People's Republic, including the people's committees. Popular uprisings against the US dictatorship were violently put down.

Source: *Hart-Landsberg, Korea (1998).*

CLIMATE VANGUARD



Syngman Rhee



Kim Il Sung

ROK and DPRK Established

On May 10th, 1948, the US engineered elections in the South, leading to the election of Syngman Rhee as president and the establishment of the ROK. In response, the North held its own elections on August 25th, leading to the election of Kim Il Sung as premier and the inauguration of the DPRK.

Source: *Hart-Landsberg, Korea (1998).*

CLIMATE VANGUARD



War Begins

Most Koreans in the South refused the US's repressive rule, leading to mass unrest and the outbreak of guerilla struggle. Meanwhile, DPRK and ROK units engaged each other in substantial border fights.

Tensions culminated in DPRK forces crossing the 38th parallel in the early hours of June 25th, 1950, likely at the deliberate provocation of Syngman Rhee.

Source: *Hart-Landsberg, Korea (1998).*



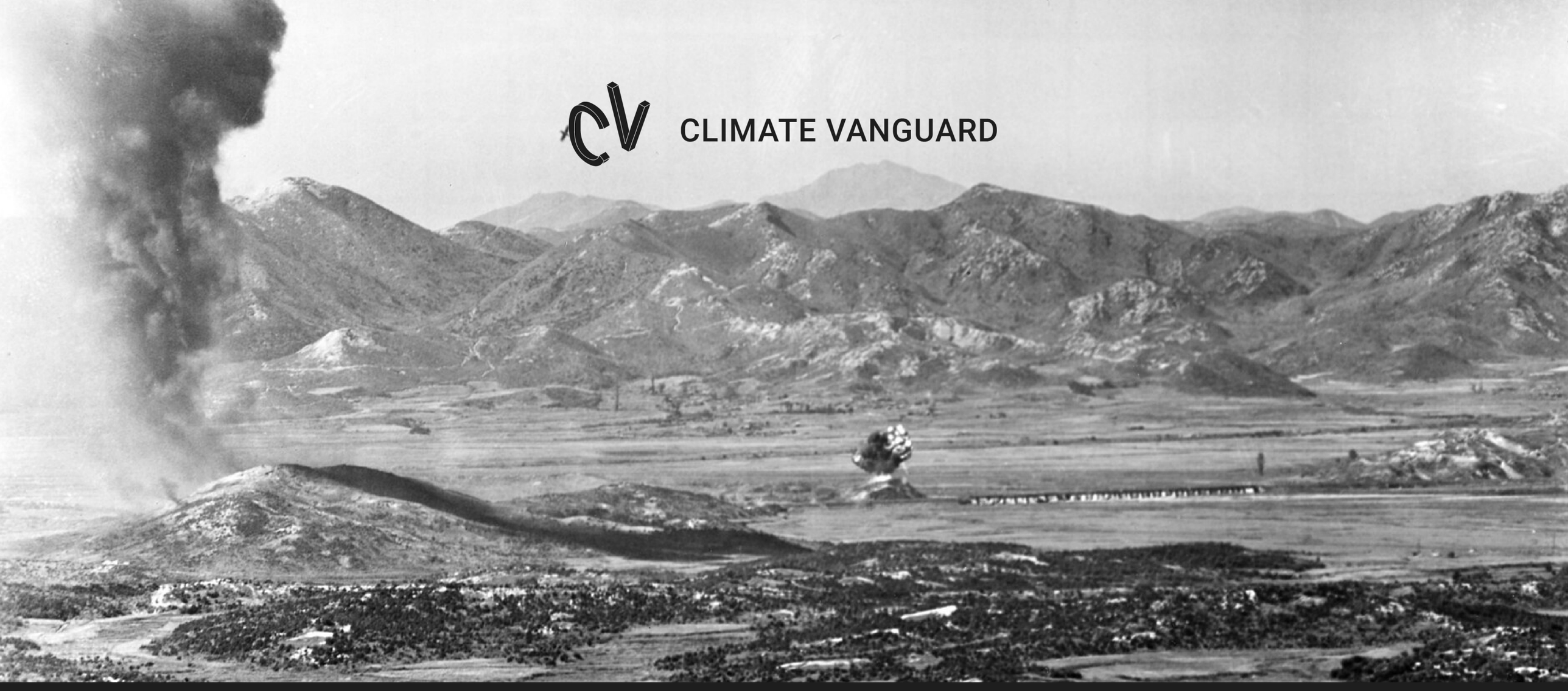
Advances & Retreats

After crossing the 38th parallel, the DPRK surged South, capturing Seoul in just three days. The DPRK's advance was ultimately stalled at the beginning of August, and by late September, the US and ROK reclaimed control of the South.

The US and ROK then swept North, pushing the DPRK close to the Chinese border. With the empire at its doorstep, the newly-formed People's Republic of China sent 250,000 soldiers across the Yalu River on the night of October 19th.*

***Note:** Korean communists (including Kim Il Sung) helped the Communist Party of China repel Japan's invasion of Manchuria, a region in Northeast China, in the 1930s.

***Source:** Hart-Landsberg, Korea (1998). **Image:** Chinese People's Volunteer Army crosses the Yalu River in 1950.*



Genocidal Warfare

In response to a resurgent North, US General Douglas MacArthur ordered a massive air attack, which went on to become the US's primary military strategy.

Over the course of the war, the US dropped 635,000 tonnes of bombs and 32,557 tonnes of napalm on the DPRK, exceeding the total tonnage of bombs dropped on the Pacific Theatre during World War II.

The US obliterated 18 of the DPRK's 22 cities and killed between 1.5 and 2.5 million Koreans in the DPRK (i.e. between 15.6% and 26% of the pre-war population). MacArthur himself recognised the utter devastation →

Source: *Hart-Landsberg, Korea (1998); Singham, Tricontinental (2025).*
Image: *US Marine Corps F4U drops napalm in Korea in October (1952).*

CLIMATE VANGUARD

“The war in Korea has already almost destroyed that nation of 20 million people. I have never seen such devastation. I have seen, I guess, as much blood and disaster as any living man, and it just curdled my stomach the last time I was there. After I looked at that wreckage and those thousands of women and children and everything, I vomited”

– Douglas MacArthur





Frozen Conflict

Between 1951 and 1953, fighting was contained around the 38th parallel, a virtual stalemate with colossal losses. On July 27th, 1953, an armistice agreement was officially signed.

Absent a formal peace treaty, the Korean War continues as a frozen conflict, the South remains an outpost of US imperialism, and the Korean people remain divided.

Source: *Hart-Landsberg, Korea (1998).*