

# NEWS DIGEST

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 1999

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*"It was just wholesale slaughter."*

## U.S. killed refugees, ex-GIs say Military says no basis found for Korean War incident

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It was a story no one wanted to hear: Early in the Korean War, villagers said, American soldiers machine-gunned hundreds of helpless civilians under a railroad bridge in the South Korean countryside.

When the families spoke out, seeking redress, they met only rejection and denial from the U.S. military and their own government in Seoul. Now a dozen ex-GIs have spoken, too, and support their story with haunting memories from a "forgotten" war.

Twelve American veterans of the Korean War say that in late July 1950, in the conflict's first desperate weeks, U.S. troops killed a large number of South Korean refugees, many of them women and children, trapped beneath a bridge at a hamlet called No Gun Ri.

In interviews with The Associated Press, ex-GIs speak of 100 or 200 or "hundreds" dead. The Koreans, whose claim for compensation was rejected last year, say 300 were killed at the bridge and 100 in a preceding air attack.

American soldiers, in their third day at the warfront, feared North Korean infiltration among the fleeing South Korean peasants, veterans told the AP.

The ex-GIs described other refugee killings as well in the war's first weeks, when U.S. commanders ordered their troops to shoot civilians, citizens of an allied nation, as a defense against disguised enemy soldiers, according to once-classified documents found by the AP in U.S. military archives.

Six veterans of the 1st Cavalry Division said they fired on the civilians at No Gun Ri, and six others said they witnessed the mass killing.

"We just annihilated them," said ex-machine gunner Norman Tinkler of Glasco, Kan.

After five decades, none gave a complete, detailed account. But the ex-GIs agreed on such elements as

time and place, and on the preponderance of women, children and old men among the victims.

Some said they were fired on from among the refugees beneath the bridge. But others said they don't remember hostile fire. One said they later found a few disguised North Korean soldiers among the dead. But others disputed this.

Some soldiers refused to shoot what one described as "civilians just trying to hide."

The 30 Korean claimants — survivors and victims' relatives — said what happened July 26-29, 1950, was an unprovoked, three-day carnage.

"The American soldiers played with our lives like boys playing with flies," said Chun Choon-ja, a 12-year-old girl at the time.

The reported death toll would make No Gun Ri one of only two known cases of large-scale killings of noncombatants by U.S. ground troops in this century's major wars, military law experts note. The other was Vietnam's My Lai massacre, in 1968, in which more than 500 Vietnamese may have died.

From the start of the 1950-53 conflict, North Korean atrocities were widely reported — the killing of civilians and summary executions of prisoners. But the story of No Gun Ri has remained undisclosed for a half-century.

The U.S. military has said repeatedly it found no basis for the allegations. On Wednesday, after the AP report was released, Pentagon spokesman P.J. Crowley said, "We just have no information in historical files to lend any clarity to what might have happened in July 1950."

The AP's research also found no official Army account of the events.

The troops who dug in at No Gun Ri, 100 miles southeast of Seoul, South Korea's capital, were members of the 7th Cavalry, a regiment of the 1st Cavalry Division.

It was the fifth week of the Korean War. Word was circulating among U.S. troops that northern soldiers disguised in white peasant garb might try to penetrate American lines via refugee groups.

"It was assumed there were

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CHUNG KOO-HO  
No Gun Ri massacre survivor

enemy in these people," ex-rifleman Herman W. Patterson of Greer, S.C., said of the civilian throng.

As they neared No Gun Ri, leading ox carts and with children on their backs, the hundreds of refugees were ordered off the dirt road by American soldiers and onto parallel railroad tracks, the Koreans said.

What then happened under the concrete bridge cannot be reconstructed in full detail. Although some ex-GIs poured out chilling memories, others offered only fragments or abruptly ended their interviews.

But the veterans corroborated the core of the Koreans' account: that American troops kept the large group of refugees pinned under the No Gun Ri railroad bridge and killed almost all of them.

"It was just wholesale slaughter," Patterson said.

Both the Koreans and several ex-GIs said the killing began when American planes suddenly swooped in and fired on an area where the white-clad refugees were resting. Bodies fell everywhere, and terrified parents dragged their children into a narrow culvert beneath the tracks, the Koreans said.

Some ex-GIs believe the air attack was a mistake, that the pilots were supposed to strike enemy artillery miles up the road. But declassified U.S. Air Force reports from mid-1950, found by the AP, show that pilots also sometimes deliberately attacked "people in white," apparently suspecting disguised North Korean soldiers were among them.

Two days earlier, 1st Cavalry Division headquarters had issued an order: "No refugees to cross the front line. Fire everyone trying to cross lines. Use discretion in case of women and children." A neighboring U.S. Army division, in its order, said civilians "are to be considered enemy."

Experts in the law of war told the AP that such orders, to shoot civilians, are plainly illegal.

The Americans directed the refugees into the 80-foot-long bridge underpasses and after dark opened fire on them from nearby machine-gun positions, the Koreans said.

Veterans said the heavy-weapons company commander, Capt. Melbourne C. Chandler, after speaking with superior officers by radio, had ordered machine-guns to set up near the tunnel mouths and open fire.

"Chandler said, 'The hell with all those people. Let's get rid of all of them,'" said Eugene Hesselman of

Fort Mitchell, Ky.

"We didn't know if they were North or South Koreans. ... We were there only a couple of days, and we didn't know them from a load of coal."

Chandler and other key officers are dead. The colonel who commanded the battalion, Herbert B. Heyer, 88, of Sandy Springs, Ga., told the AP he knew nothing about the shootings, and "I know I didn't give such an order." Veterans said the colonel apparently was leaving operations to subordinates at the time.

The Korean claimants said those near the tunnel entrances died first.

"People pulled dead bodies around them for protection," said survivor Chung Koo-ho, 61. "Mothers wrapped their children with blankets and hugged them with their backs toward the entrances. ... My mother died on the second day of shooting."

All 24 South Korean survivors interviewed individually by the AP said they remembered no North Koreans or gunfire directed at the Americans. One suggested the Americans were seeing their own comrades' gunfire ricocheting through from the tunnels' opposite ends.

Relevant U.S. Army documents say nothing about North Korean soldiers killed under a bridge or anything else about No Gun Ri.

The precise death toll will never be known. The survivors believe 300 were killed at the bridge and 100 in the air attack. Ex-GIs close to the bridge generally put the dead there at about 200. "A lot" also were killed in the air attack, they say.

One battalion lieutenant located by the AP said he was in the area but knew nothing about the killing of civilians. "I have honestly never, ever heard of this from either my soldiers or superiors or my friends," said John C. Lippincott of Stone Mountain, Ga. He said he could have missed it because "we were extremely spread out."

The U.S. government's civil liability may be limited. It is largely protected by U.S. law against foreign lawsuits related to "combatant activities," although the claimants say the killings were not directly combat-related.

War crimes prosecution appears even less likely. The U.S. military code condemns indiscriminate killing of civilians, even if a few enemy soldiers are among a large number of noncombatants killed, legal experts note. But prosecution so many years later is a practical impossibility, they say.

### World and Nation

#### Datelines

#### Washington Reagan biographer defends literary technique

WASHINGTON (AP) — Stung by some of the criticism erupting over his work, Ronald Reagan's biographer says he's taking heart from support expressed by several members of the former president's family even as others close to Reagan pile on him.

Edmund Morris said Wednesday he welcomes the controversy over the literary technique he uses in "Dutch: A Memoir of Ronald Reagan," in which he makes himself a fictional character in the president's early life and invents a few other people, too.

"We're at the gateway of the 21st century now and it's time for biography to explore new fields," he said in a phone interview from New York.

#### Washington Clinton vows to forgive certain nations' debts

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Clinton pledged Wednesday to forgive all the debt owed the United States by 36 of the world's poorest countries, lamenting that nearly 40 million people die of hunger each year and 1.3 billion people struggle on less than \$1 a day.

"Simply put, unsustainable debt is helping to keep too many poor countries and poor people in poverty," Clinton said. He said the United States could not in good conscience ask impoverished nations to choose between making interest payments on their debt or investing in their children's education.

#### Washington Gore moves campaign headquarters to Tennessee

WASHINGTON (AP) — Vice President Al Gore, shaken by the unexpected strength of Bill Bradley's challenge for the Democratic presidential nomination, abruptly uprooted his inside-the-Beltway campaign Wednesday for a move to Tennessee and "an opportunity for transformation."

"This is a hard, tough fight," said Gore, challenging Bradley to a series of issue debates.

By relocating his headquarters from Washington's K Street, a corridor of lobbying and law firms, to Nashville's Church Street, the former Tennessee senator who grew up in Washington said he hoped to "get closer to the American people, closer to the grassroots and out of the Beltway and into the heartland."

#### Belgrade Police stop protest headed for Milosevic's residence

BELGRADE, Yugoslavia (AP) — Police armed with batons and sticks broke up a demonstration of more than 30,000 protesters trying to march to President Slobodan Milosevic's residence Wednesday night.

The emotional crowd had stormed through Belgrade's downtown boulevards, waving their fists and shouting "Slobo, you betrayed Kosovo."

As the protesters reached a second police cordon, three water canons drew up behind the line of officers, apparently intimidating the demonstrators, who were threatening to march some two miles to Milosevic's neighborhood.

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The Daily Nebraskan (USPS 144-080) is published by the UNL Publications Board, Nebraska Union 20, 1400 R St., Lincoln, NE 68588-0448, Monday through Friday during the academic year, weekly during the summer sessions. The public has access to the Publications Board. Readers are encouraged to submit story ideas and comments to the Daily Nebraskan by calling (402) 472-2588.

Subscriptions are \$60 for one year.  
Postmaster: Send address changes to the Daily Nebraskan, Nebraska Union 20, 1400 R St., Lincoln NE 68588-0448. Periodical postage paid at Lincoln, NE.

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