

# From Korea to Kosovo: the No Gun Ri massacre

by Edward Spannaus

In the early weeks of the Korean War, hundreds of South Korean civilian refugees were killed by U.S. soldiers, according to accounts of survivors and ex-GIs who were interviewed for a story released by Associated Press on Sept. 30. The massacre at No Gun Ri (or Nokuen-Ri), 100 miles southeast of Seoul, took place in late July 1950, just five weeks into the war.

An 18-month investigation by Associated Press uncovered a story which the Pentagon had suppressed for almost half a century. AP found a dozen or so American veterans who said that they had been ordered to fire on refugees, and that at least 100-200 had been killed. Korean survivors of the incident say that the number of civilians killed was more like 400. The reasons given for the shootings were that North Korean soldiers were disguised among the refugees. Some ex-GI's maintain that this was the case; others dispute it. AP said that all of those interviewed agreed that the victims were predominantly women, children, and older men.

On Oct. 21, ABC "Nightline" ran a program on No Gun Ri, which included interviews with U.S. veterans who acknowledged that they had been ordered to shoot refugees.

## Investigations under way

On Sept. 30, the date of the publication of the AP story, President Clinton asked Army Secretary Louis Caldera to conduct a full investigation of the reports of the No Gun Ri massacre, saying that the review is important to the active and retired members of the Armed Forces, for public confidence in the Armed Forces, and for "our relationship with the people of the Republic of Korea."

On Oct. 8, U.S. Defense Secretary William Cohen sent a letter to South Korean President Kim Dae-jung promising a full investigation and complete information-sharing with the South Koreans, and on Oct. 27, the Pentagon announced that an Army investigative team was being sent to South Korea to consult with government officials there on the investigation. That team was led by the Army's Inspector General, Lt. Gen. Michael Ackerman; among other things, the team visited the site of the bridge at No Gun Ri where the massacre took place.

On Nov. 2, the Pentagon announced the creation of a

commission of outside experts "to provide advice and guidance on the Nokuen-Ri investigation." The committee includes two former commanders in Korea; two former soldiers, former U.S. Rep. Pete McCloskey of California and *Washington Post* writer Dan Oberdorfer; historian Ernest May; and former Ambassador Donald Gregg.

## Why did it happen?

In an article entitled "Where Franklin Roosevelt Was Interrupted" (*EIR*, July 17, 1998), *EIR* founder Lyndon LaRouche wrote that "the principal problems of 1949-51 were, that the U.S.A., in its foolish excess of power-sharing with the British and other allies, had surrendered the sovereignty of the U.S.A. to an increasing degree of meddling by supranational authority." More specifically, LaRouche noted that President Harry Truman had abandoned Franklin Roosevelt's post-war perspective, and had adopted "the world-government perspective of Bertrand Russell and Winston Churchill, a policy launched by unnecessary nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki." The idea behind this, going back to H.G. Wells, was that the use of nuclear weapons would be so terrible that nations would give up their national sovereignty and submit to world government.

In the case of the Korean War, conducted as a farcical "United Nations war," LaRouche says that the United States had given up its use of appropriate military means, "by denying itself access to means which might not be pleasing to the Bertrand Russell and Winston Churchill devotees of a nuclear march toward world government."

This also translated into an utter lack of preparation for the U.S. soldiers who were abruptly sent into the Korean conflict in 1950.

As U.S. Army Col. Carl Bernard (ret.) told *EIR*, there was a prevailing belief at the time that the infantry soldier didn't count any more, now that we were in the nuclear age. The soldiers sent to Korea were untrained and under-equipped; the equipment that the troops who were at No Gun Ri brought with them, was ill-maintained and often obsolete.

Bernard, whose unit was about 25 miles from No Gun Ri, says, "We thought the war was going to be over in a week." As he describes in the accompanying article, "American soldiers were in a state of psychic disarmament" in the post-war period, and were not at all prepared to face the competent and efficient North Korean troops.

Bernard further traces the problem back to the "air power" doctrine being promoted already in the 1920s. "The solution to war suggested by [Air Marshall] Douhet in 1922 and demonstrated most recently in Kosovo, is to use ever fancier and more expensive aircraft to bomb small countries into doing what we demand," Bernard told a recent assembly of his regimental veterans.

"The myths he [Douhet] ascribed to, would make armies unnecessary, and make all visible problems disappear," Ber-

nard added. "The only trouble is that none of it works, as Kosovo and other wars keep demonstrating."

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## Guest Commentary

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# The high cost of not being ready

by Carl F. Bernard

*Carl F. Bernard, a retired Army Colonel, won a Distinguished Service Cross for extraordinary heroism in the Korean War. The following article has also been published by the Los Angeles Times and the International Herald Tribune.*

If civilians were massacred at No Gun Ri, it was by untrained and under-equipped U.S. soldiers under brutal assault.

Did U.S. infantrymen massacre more than 100 South Koreans in 1950 during the chaotic early weeks of the Korean War? A Pentagon investigation now under way must answer that question. Yet the more important questions are: How could young American soldiers do such a thing? Can we keep it from happening again?

The current Pentagon investigation involved H Company, 7th Cavalry. At the time, I was a second lieutenant with L Company, 21st Infantry, about 25 miles east of No Gun Ri.

Our "occupation army" in Japan was not ready, in any sense, for the Korean War. The nuclear bombs that took out Hiroshima and Nagasaki seemed to have ended fighting as the Army understood it. American soldiers were in a state of psychic disarmament. Inertia and the distractions of Japanese "social" life finished our battle readiness. Our weapons were relics, often inoperable. Our communications equipment, radios and wire, were too old and beat-up to function in heavy dew, let alone monsoon rains.

We went to fight tanks with a piece of failed anti-tank trash (the 2.36-inch "bazooka") the gravediggers in World War II often found ground up in the bodies of GIs because it would not stop tanks. The terror that bazooka-proof tanks imposed on exposed infantry makes "blind panic" seem a commendation. The myth of airplanes coming from the heavens to rescue our soldiers melted with the early morning mist and low-hanging clouds. The rain took out radios to our supporting artillery; tank's tracks took out the telephone lines that supplemented the radios.

None of these damning mechanical and operational faults

hinted at the size of our most grievous, distressful problem: the continuous transfer of personnel well before they could learn their jobs and the capabilities of their comrades in arms, whether chiefs or subordinates, or of the enemy. Strangers do not make effective fighting units. The 30-man platoon assigned to me in Task Force Smith was my fourth different one in the nine months before this battle.

Yet we went to Korea believing that the North Koreans would turn and head back north as soon as they discovered we were there. Sadly, we were no more than a souvenir-loaded speed bump for North Koreans at our first blocking position. Our seven hours in position bought us only one precious day. Our next five days delaying their move southward toward Pusan cost the Division the best part of three battalions.

These North Korean successes were not lost on the American units coming over from Japan. The North Korean army's successful technique of pinning down the 24th Infantry Division's battalion-sized units with frontal attacks, circling around their exposed flanks and installing themselves behind these battalions to then launch coordinated infantry-tank attacks over the top of our improvised defenses could not be countered. The Division Commander was captured and the remnants of two Regiments were lost in Taejon. U.S. prisoners broadcast their fates and apologies over Seoul City Sue's radio station.

Pulling back south toward Pusan, where most U.S. units' hopes of re-embarking, including the unit accused of the slaughter of No Gun Ri, were shared by many people. The Army's official history quotes this outfit's war diary as saying, two days after the supposed slaughter at the bridge, that the "increased uneasiness of the untested staff and troops . . . had become magnified and exaggerated." Reports of an enemy breakthrough caused the withdrawal of the 2nd Battalion, "an untried unit, [to be] scattered in panic. That evening 119 of its men were still missing. In this frantic departure from its position, the battalion left behind a switchboard, an emergency lighting unit, and weapons of all types. After daylight truck drivers and platoon sergeants returned to the scene and recovered 14 machine guns, 9 radios, 120 M-1 rifles, 26 carbines, 7 Browning automatic rifles, and six 60-mm. mortars."

These units and their men were not remotely ready for the costly operations they were sent to do in Korea. The ignorance of their chiefs was matched only by their incompetence. Men paid for this shameful neglect in blood, pain, and imprisonment.

Were all units like this? Of course not. But enough were to make our Army's subsequent disgraceful conduct undeniable, despite what may have been a very successful cover-up until now. How can we keep this from happening again?

A fruitful beginning might be telling the truth, and avoiding false reports designed to ensure promotions for individual commanders.