

July 26, 1950: The No Gun Ri Massacre, South Korea

Led by US 8th Army

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The Korean War is not publicly commemorated like the Civil War or World War II, so it is little wonder that the Korean War massacre, [No Gun Ri](#), is also hidden from public memory. The event is one of the deadliest acts committed by U.S. ground troops in the 20th century. If reports of upwards of 300 civilians killed are correct, then the event is comparable to better known tragedies such as the 1968 My Lai Massacre.

What Happened?

On July 26, 1950, the U.S. 8th Army, the highest level of command in South Korea, ordered that all Korean civilians traveling and moving around the country must be stopped. It was declared that “no refugees will be permitted to cross battle lines at any time. Movement of all Koreans in groups will cease immediately.” The army stated that it was fearful of North Korean guerrilla troops disguising themselves as peasants.

One day earlier, U.S. soldiers had roused hundreds of civilians from villages near the town of Yongdong in central South Korea and ordered them south along the main road, as a North Korean invasion force pushed toward the area. On July 26, these civilian refugees approached a railroad bridge near the village of No Gun Ri.

Members of the U.S. 7th Cavalry Regiment dug in near No Gun Ri and only three days into their time at the war front opened fire on the civilians. One veteran recalls being instructed “fire on everything, kill ‘em all.” Over the course of a three-day barrage of gunfire and air strafing, hundreds of South Korean civilians were killed. Survivors recall a stream under the bridge running red with blood and 7th Cavalry veterans recall the near constant screams of women and children. Estimates range anywhere from 100 to upwards of 300 deaths.

Uncovering the Story Five Decades Later

This tragic event was almost unreported outside of the Korean peninsula until 1999 when three Associated Press (AP) journalists, [Sang-Hun Choe](#), [Charles J. Hanley](#), and [Martha Mendoza](#), brought the story to international attention. Choe had originally become aware of the allegations when one of the survivors wrote a book in 1994 about the events. Initially the AP did not allow the story, but in 1998 he was able to pursue it with Hanley and Mendoza. They conducted an extensive investigation, including hundreds of interviews with veterans and Korean survivors and a review of thousands of military documents. However, they had to fight for close to a year to get the story published.

Their [original story](#), which included testimony from numerous U.S. soldiers and Korean

survivors, prompted an immediate investigation by the U.S. military and they won a Pulitzer Prize for their work. The ultimate report by the U.S. military, which left out or ignored numerous pieces of evidence, found that the deaths at No Gun Ri were “an unfortunate tragedy” and “not a deliberate killing.”

Charles Hanley noted that “the story of No Gun Ri was shocking when it emerged in 1999, but within the following decade it became clear that events like this were quite common place during the Korean War, and it is in some ways what war is all about.” Immense pressure is still placed on journalists to mitigate reporting on stories such as these. The No Gun Ri massacre serves to illustrate once again the horrors of war and the challenges of accurately reporting them.

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Story prepared by Zinn Education Project intern Rachel Mullin based on an interview with Charles Hanley, journalist and co-author of [The Bridge at No Gun Ri: A Hidden Nightmare from the Korean War](#) and [Ghost Flames: Life and Death in a Hidden War, Korea 1950-1953](#).

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