

US magazine seeks to undermine accounts of Korean War massacre

Shannon Jones
30 May 2000

An article published in the May 22 edition of *US News & World Report* attempts to cast doubt on assertions, backed by substantial evidence, that US soldiers killed hundreds of civilians trapped under a railroad bridge during the first months of the Korean War. The massacre took place over three days beginning July 26, 1950 at a place called No Gun Ri, when members of the 1st Cavalry division's 7th regiment fired on a group of refugees.

Titled "Doubts about a Korean massacre," the article attempts to undermine an investigative report published by the Associated Press in September 1999 which quoted US veterans who participated in or witnessed the killings as well as Korean survivors. AP also uncovered formerly classified US military documents showing that the high command ordered troops to fire on columns of civilian refugees attempting to cross battle lines on the grounds that they might harbor North Korean infiltrators.

The AP report forced Defense Secretary William Cohen to order an investigation of the massacre claims. In May Defense Department officials told the *New York Times* that they had confirmed that US soldiers fired on unarmed civilians. For decades the US military adamantly refused to acknowledge claims by Korean survivors of a mass shooting of civilians at No Gun Ri.

In its attempt to discredit accounts of the massacre, *US News* focuses on the testimony of one US soldier, Edward Daily, a veteran interviewed by AP who claimed he was ordered to fire on refugees under direct orders. Subsequent investigations of military records have raised some doubts whether Daily was actually at No Gun Ri at the time of the massacre. Daily was severely traumatized by the war and has undergone extensive therapy.

However Daily was only one of fifty sources that AP

used to document the massacre. Other soldiers interviewed corroborated the essential details of Daily's account.

Eugene Hesselman of Fort Mitchell Kentucky told AP that the unit commander, Capt. Melbourne Chandler, told them to fire on the refugees under the bridge—"The hell with all those people. Let's get rid of all of them," he said.

Retired Colonel Robert M. Carroll, then a first lieutenant, said that soldiers in his unit opened fire on refugees from their foxholes. "This is right after we get orders that nobody comes through, civilian, military, nobody."

"We just annihilated them," said a former machine-gunner, Norman Tinkler.

US soldiers interviewed by AP told of two smaller but similar massacres of refugees in July and August 1950. They also told of soldiers refusing orders to fire on civilians.

AP also interviewed 24 survivors of the massacre. Chung Koo-ho said, "Mothers wrapped their children with blankets and hugged them with their backs toward the entrances. My mother died on the second day of shooting."

There are 120 known names of Koreans killed. Other victims are unknown because in some cases whole families were wiped out, leaving no one to report their deaths. In other cases survivors scattered throughout Korea.

The *US News* piece does not comment on Korean War-era US military documents uncovered by AP which show that commanders made it a policy to fire on Korean civilians. The US 8th Army in Korea sent radioed orders across the battlefield that began, "No, repeat, no refugees, will be permitted to cross battle lines at any time."

Two days earlier 1st Cavalry Division headquarters ordered, “No refugees to cross the front line. Fire everyone trying to cross lines. Use discretion in case of women and children.”

In the nearby 25th Infantry Division Major General William Kean told his soldiers, “all civilians seen in this area are to be considered as enemy and action taken accordingly.” The July 26 communications log for the 25th Division reads, “all civilians moving around in combat zones will be considered unfriendly and shot.”

The No Gun Ri massacre, as well as others unreported, flowed from the character of the war waged by the United States, which was aimed at smashing a popular insurgency directed against the domination of the Korean peninsula by capitalist powers. Thus, every civilian in this conflict represented a potential enemy of the United States. In the Korean War American bombers devastated wide areas of the country. As many as two million civilians were killed in the conflict, about 10 percent of the pre-war population of North and South Korea. Later, in Vietnam, US imperialism employed the same methods.

In the recent one-sided war against Serbia the US Air Force bombed power stations, water treatment facilities, factories and a television station. All of these are considered civilian targets and are off limits according to international conventions which the US and the other imperialist powers claim to uphold.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact