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Erin Marie Starr

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## “LET’S GET RID OF ALL OF THEM”: NO GUN RI AND THE AMERICAN POLICY OF SHOOTING REFUGEES DURING THE KOREAN WAR

Erin Marie Starr

On June 27, 1950, only two days after the North Korean army pushed into South Korea, the United States (U.S.) officially entered the Korean War. The U.S. quickly learned that this new war differed from any they had fought before. Contending not only with the regular Korean People’s Army, the U.S. troops also faced guerrilla warfare and spies hiding among the massive numbers of refugees fleeing south. To prevent the U.S. troop positions from being known to enemy forces, the military issued orders to keep refugees from crossing U.S. lines. While it was a sound policy in theory, the orders led to atrocities being committed on refugees. One example is the incident at No Gun Ri where several hundred refugees were trapped under a railroad bridge and under fire from air and ground troops for three days. Buried by the pro-American and totalitarian regimes that formed after the armistice, No Gun Ri remained an unnoticed moment in the United States’ “forgotten war” until actions in South Korea during the 1990s raised the issue to the surface. In September 1999 when *The Associated Press* writers Sang-Hun Choe, Charles J. Hanley, and Martha Mendoza published their string of articles on the No Gun Ri massacre during the Korean War, the first articles to break the news in the U.S., they sparked a controversy over the question of whether the Army ordered the soldiers to open fire.<sup>1</sup> While the Army claimed that no order was given in the *Report of the No Gun Ri Review*, the official investigation conducted by the U.S. Army, the available evidence, the memos, field journals, and flight records dating from the time of the massacre and afterward, paint a picture very different from the official report.<sup>2</sup> Military documents show that the use of deadly force as a means to control the “refugee problem” became an ongoing strategy even before No Gun Ri and the excuse of inexperienced soldiers cannot explain the numerous incidents of needless slaughter.

On September 19, 1999 Sang-Hun Choe, Charles J. Hanley, and Martha Mendoza published three articles and one timeline of events during the Korean War. The first article

broke the story about an event that occurred in late July 1950 in which several hundred Korean refugees were slain by United States troops.<sup>3</sup> Through documents found in the U.S. National Archives, interviews with Korean War veterans who were supposedly present, and interviews with the Korean victims and their families, *The Associated Press* writers pieced together the events that occurred at No Gun Ri from July 26 to July 29. Later, the trio published *The Bridge at No Gun Ri: A Hidden Nightmare from the Korean War* which greatly expounded on the original articles, chronicling the events of both the 7th Cavalry and Koreans before the incident.<sup>4</sup> Less than a month after the first articles, another article told of other atrocities committed against refugees by U.S. troops.<sup>5</sup> Publication of the articles started a media frenzy as other journal outlets began to take notice of massacres that had occurred nearly fifty years earlier. These events finally forced the United States to investigate the incident which despite multiple petitions, the country previously refused. However, the conclusion of the investigation did not provide a conclusive answer.

In the original article, the recounts from victims and G.I.s did not always match even among themselves in regard to certain facts. These discrepancies include the number of civilians killed, whether an air strike was called in, who began shooting first, if weapons were found on the bodies, and most importantly, if the soldiers were ordered to open fire. Detractors quickly found fault with the story. First, pointing out how green soldiers thrown into a stressful and volatile situation could easily lead to mistakes being made and later attempting to discredit the entire story because evidence showed that one veteran lied about his own involvement. Despite naysayers’ claims of a fabricated event, the United States government acknowledged an incident at No Gun Ri did occur, but exactly how it occurred leaves room for debate.

According to the Korean account, on July 23 roughly ten American soldiers accompanied by a South Korean police officer came to the village of Chu Gok Ri and ordered

the villagers to evacuate due to the possibility of a battle occurring in the area.<sup>6</sup> Many villagers did not want to leave their homes. They attempted to stay inside but “the Americans dragged them out” and forced them to the village of Im Gye Ri. On July 25, the villagers were forced to move again at bayonet point.<sup>7</sup> The combined refugees of Chu Gok Ri and Im Gye Ri, numbering around five hundred, were forced off the road by U.S. soldiers and into a riverbed near Ha Ga Ri where they spent the night.<sup>8</sup> Chun Choon-ja, ten-years old at the time of the incident, stated that “people who strayed away from the group were shot and killed,” and other villagers corroborated her story and added those who strayed away “went off to relieve themselves.”<sup>9</sup> After moving on the next day, a different group of U.S. soldiers approached the villagers. The soldiers checked their belongings, confiscating anything deemed a weapon, but most items were kitchen knives and farming implements. The villagers then claimed that the soldiers used a radio to report something, quickly left, and then airplanes began to strafe and bomb the area surrounding the bridge.<sup>10</sup>

One of the main detractors of *The Associated Press* story, Robert L. Bateman, proposed a different theory on how the refugees arrived at No Gun Ri in his book *No Gun Ri: A Military History of the Korean War Incident*.<sup>11</sup> Bateman believes that refugees were “swept up” by a company that lost their way during a change at the front line. Earlier in the day the newly arrived 7th Cavalry Regiment relieved and replaced the 8th Cavalry Regiment. Team Field, a force from F Company 2nd Battalion 8th Cavalry, was cut off from the normal route out of Yongdong, had out-of-date maps, and were lost looking for other members of the regiment. Bateman believes that the refugees who found their way to No Gun Ri had been “inadvertently swept up” by Team Field on their “wandering” and sent toward the position of the 2nd Battalion 7th Cavalry.<sup>12</sup> In his version, no concerted effort was made on the side of the U.S. and South Korea to move the refugees and the evacuation of villagers happened as an accident.

There are multiple holes in Bateman’s theory. First, the proposed path that Team Field followed did not go near either of the villages named in the Korean account.

Bateman’s path showed Team Field moving south of Yongdong before turning north roughly a kilometer to the east of Yongdong. The villages of Chu Gok Ri and Im Gye Ri, on the other hand, are one to two kilometers farther east than the proposed path.<sup>13</sup> Second, his version denies the presence of South Korean police officers at the evacuation. If Team Field had actually picked up refugees who had already left or were planning to leave, then the presence of police officers in the Korean account does not make sense.

Ample evidence shows that the task of removing villagers from the battle areas fell to the South Korean police. The letter from John Muccio, ambassador to South Korea, to Assistant Secretary of State Dean Rusk lists several decisions made “by the military” regarding the movement of refugees by the police.<sup>14</sup> The first states that if the army deems it necessary to evacuate civilians in a certain area, the tactical commander “will notify the police liaison officers attached to his HQ, who through the area Korean National Police will notify the inhabitants, and start them southward under police control on specified minor routes.”<sup>15</sup> Another states that “no mass movements unless police controlled will be permitted.”<sup>16</sup> The 8th Army Headquarters confirmed these decisions in a message to the frontlines which states “no area will be evacuated by Koreans without direct order from CG EUSAK or upon order of Div commanders, each Div will be assigned three national police liaison officers to assist in clearing any area of the civilian populace that will interfere with the successful accomplishment of his mission.”<sup>17</sup> Finally, Bateman’s version has the refugees moving through the night, while in the Korean version they stopped overnight. Again, the Korean version is more in line with the official Army order. Both the Muccio letter and the 8th Army message stated that no refugee movement would be permitted after dark.<sup>18</sup>

Documentation makes it easier to trace the whereabouts and movements of the 7th Cavalry Regiment during the days before and during the incident. The 7th Cavalry Regiment first set foot on Korean soil on July 22, 1950. Three days later, the 2nd Battalion made its way to the frontlines a few miles east of Yongdong, a position

previously held by the 8th Cavalry Regiment who was now withdrawing behind friendly lines.<sup>19</sup> On their first night in combat, a series of mistakes led to a disorganized retreat. North of the 2nd Battalion's position, the 27th Infantry Division was engaged in combat to delay the North Korean advance, and exaggeration of the fighting brought news of an enemy breakthrough. 7th Cavalry headquarters decided to call for the withdrawal of the 2nd Battalion.<sup>20</sup> However, the withdrawal was not orderly. The *No Gun Ri Review* called it a "disorganized and undisciplined" retreat, fairly innocuous words for what really happened: the 2nd Battalion panicked and scattered.<sup>21</sup> Over one-hundred men from the 2nd Battalion went missing the night of the retreat, later joining up with the battalion again the next day just north of No Gun Ri.<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, the 1st Battalion 7th Cavalry arrived in the area after a delay in Pohangdong and took up position on the south side of the tracks near Hill 207.<sup>23</sup> All of the parties were now in place for the incident at the No Gun Ri bridge.

While the refugees stood on the railroad tracks above the No Gun Ri bridge, U.S. airplanes attacked them. Both U.S. veteran accounts and Korean accounts agree that the attack by airplane occurred with strafing. The Korean victims claimed that the troops called in the airstrike by radio, but the likelihood of a deliberate attack on July 26 was slim. The airstrike caught the 7th Cavalry Regiment troops and refugees unaware, forcing them to pile into the tunnel with refugees or take refuge in foxholes outside.<sup>24</sup> In addition, the SCR-300 field radios used by troops could not directly contact airplanes. The two types of radios transmitted on different frequency types, field radios on frequency modulation (FM) and airplanes on amplitude modulation (AM).<sup>25</sup> Even if the soldiers had requested an air strike, the time it would have taken to go through the proper channels would have made it impossible for such a timely response. The "Statement of Mutual Understanding" states that "research does not reflect any mission flown on the 26th July in the vicinity of No Gun Ri."<sup>26</sup> Available mission reports do reflect this. From the records, the closest aircraft mission involved the 35th Fighter Bomber Squadron's Mission 35-11, which took off in the afternoon of July 26, the destination the "Yongdong area" and, specifically, the "road North from Yongdong to

Chengsan."<sup>27</sup> The "Statement of Mutual Understanding" does mention that mission reports for three missions in the vicinity of No Gun Ri were unable to be located.<sup>28</sup> It is possible that Mission 35-11 was off target or one of the missing reports indicated a flight closer to the location of No Gun Ri.

The *No Gun Ri Review* confirmed that "ground fire, including small arms, artillery, and mortar fire, hit and injured or killed some Korean refugees in the vicinity of No Gun Ri during the last week of July, 1950."<sup>29</sup> While it cannot be denied that the incident occurred, the reason that troops began firing on the refugees is another example of the confusion surrounding the events at No Gun Ri. In the first Associate Press article to break the story, according to ex-soldier Eugene Hesselman the order to open fire came from Captain Melbourne C. Chandler, who's exact words were "The Hell with all those people. Let's get rid of all of them."<sup>30</sup> The *No Gun Ri Review* does not reflect the findings of *The Associated Press* writers, and instead offers two explanations for gunfire. The first explanation concluded that soldiers "told to keep the civilians pinned down or stopped" fired above the heads of refugees to keep them in place. The second explanation concluded that other soldiers returned fire in self-defense when they believed hostile fire was coming out of the tunnel.<sup>31</sup> The second explanation can also be found in *The Associated Press* articles, which further explained from interview quotes that there was a possibility of the hostile fire actually being their own shots ricocheting back at them.<sup>32</sup> The *No Gun Ri Review* provides very little information on the number of interviewees who held the above opinions—only referring to the number as "some" or "several"—and no information on which battalion of the 7th Cavalry Regiment they were from.<sup>33</sup> As both accounts agree the refugees were searched for weapons before the airstrike, the official explanation of returning hostile fire does not make sense. Without the information on interviewees, it is unknown if there was a correlation between which battalion conducted the search on the refugees and the battalion of the interviewees who provided the different explanations.

The credibility of *The Associated Press* reports, as well as the Korean accounts, were called into question by some

observers. Interviewees lying about involvement and the appearance of the sudden petition from the South Koreans are all points that have been brought up to discredit the story and propose that the massacre did not actually occur. While all of these are important reasons to question the validity of the No Gun Ri incident, and it is somewhat hard to question it when the U.S. Army has acknowledged the event took place.

Shortly after *The Associated Press* articles came out, the service records for one interviewee, Edward L. Daily, became available through the Freedom of Information Act. The records showed that Daily was not in the area of No Gun Ri on the days the incident occurred, nor was he even in Korea. In 1950, Daily served as a mechanic in the 27th Ordinance Maintenance Battalion in Japan, and it was not until March 1951 that he transferred to the 2nd Battalion 7th Cavalry.<sup>34</sup> While questions existed on the validity of Daily's statements before publication of *The Associated Press* articles, Hanley felt that Daily provided sufficient evidence, along with corroborating stories of other soldiers, to include his quotes in the article. In a letter to Bateman Hanley stated:

[After looking at] more than 100 interviews with 84 men of the 2nd Battalion and saw enough Daily connections and overall context—i.e., the common sense of it all—to begin to feel comfortable again. Then when Ed told me on the phone about the driver's license and other things, I felt more comfortable. When I saw them myself, that was it. The H Co. driver's license alone is unassailable—old, worn-at-the-corners dark blue cardboard, with appropriately faded typescript, signature, rubber stamp of the provost marshal. All the rest was convincing, too; as I said, I stopped paying rapt attention because of the overkill. Obviously, it would a superhuman hoax—by a man who never knew he'd be challenged in this way—to have constructed such a personal history.<sup>35</sup>

Perhaps more important is how the articles used his false record. Daily was only a minor source of the first article, with only three quotes attributed to him, "providing no essential information" as Hanley and Mendoza later explained.<sup>36</sup> Daily's quotes focused on the feelings after such an incident, where in one he claims, "I can still hear

the cries, the little kids screaming," and in another that "we all share a guilt feeling, something that remains with everyone."<sup>37</sup> Edward Daily lied about his involvement in the No Gun Ri incident, and the articles now carry an editor's note reflecting this fact, but the false information from one of numerous sources should not be enough to completely discredit the entire event.

Even before the story of Edward Daily became news, many questioned *The Associated Press* story due to the lack of any previous mention of the incident. Bruce Cumings and William Stueck, Korean War historians, told the *New York Times* that "there was no previous report of any atrocity of this magnitude by United States forces in the Korean War," and that most instances of atrocities were committed by Koreans against each other.<sup>38</sup> However, the information released in 1999 was far from the first time the Korean victims tried to gain acknowledgement of the incident from the United States government.

The original petitions from the South Koreans and return letters are in *The Truth of the No Gun Ri Massacre*. The first petition was written in 1960, followed by several more petitions in the 1990s.<sup>39</sup> The small number can be directly linked to the political climate in South Korea after the war, which left no recourse for victims to tell their story or claim compensation. Much like the Red Scare in the United States, South Koreans who voiced any type of dissent against the South Korean or American governments, including mention of the massacre, were subjugated to political investigations under suspicion of being a communist sympathizer.<sup>40</sup> The 1960 petition can be attributed to the removal of Syngman Rhee as president, which ushered in "a brief window of liberalization" in South Korea, but the U.S. military claims office told the victims they missed the deadline to file the petition, and it was ignored.<sup>41</sup> The later petitions met with two responses. The U.S. answered the 1994 petition with the following statement: "It appears that the incident giving rise to your claims arose directly from a combat activity of the Armed Forces. The United States is not legally liable for such claims resulting from an act of the Armed Forces of the United States in combat." After the 1997 petition, the United States repeated the previous statement, but also included that "there is no evidence to support the claims

nor is there any evidence to show that the U.S. 1st Cavalry Division was in the area where the incident allegedly occurred."<sup>42</sup> Intentional suppression of information and denial of the event created the "no previous account" misconception.

“The Hell with all those people. Let's get rid of all of them.”

No Gun Ri may be the best-known instance, but it was not the only time U.S. troops killed Korean civilians in massive numbers. After the No Gun Ri story became publicized, South Korean survivors came forward to talk about roughly forty similar incidents during the first year of the war.<sup>43</sup> Though told to avoid civilians when attacking, many pilots ignored the order and "bombed major population centers by radar, or dumped off huge amounts of napalm on secondary targets," later pointing out that leaflets were dropped warning civilians while knowing leaflets were ineffective.<sup>44</sup> An incident similar to No Gun Ri occurred only a few days later on August 3, as the Army retreated across the Naktong River into Taegu. Both the Tuksong-dong Bridge incident and the Naktong River Bridge incident occurred in much the same way. In order to stop the advancing North Korean troops from following into Taegu, the Army planted explosives on the bridge, detonating them to prevent further crossings. However, in both instances large numbers of refugees remained on the bridges. The person who gave the order to detonate the Tuksong-dong Bridge is unknown, but the order to detonate the Naktong River Bridge came directly from the commander of the 1st Cavalry Division, Major General Hobart R. Gay. He later stated that the decision to blow up the bridge was tough, but days earlier Gay had given a statement to reporters that "he was sure most of the white-clad columns pressing toward American lines were North Korean guerrillas" and that "we must find a means to hold these refugees in place."<sup>45</sup> Given time and

an outlet to share their stories, it is likely that more victims or their family members will come forward and bring other unknown incidents to light.

Looking at an incident without the greater context of the Korean War can skew the reality of exactly how such a situation could occur, as well as paint the U.S. soldiers in an unnecessarily negative light. As William T. Sherman aptly put it: "War is hell." There will always be circumstances that lead to undesirable actions, and the case of the Korean War is no different. Several factors combined in Korea to lead up to incidents such as No Gun Ri. Boundary and government issues first led to civil unrest in South Korea, the speed at which North Korea pushed back the U.S. and Republic of Korea (ROK) forces demoralized the troops, and the U.S. military deployed to Korea were overconfident and underprepared. Add in the massive numbers of refugees fleeing from the battle areas, and they made for a deadly combination.

General disregard for Koreans may have begun shortly after the end of World War II. After the United Nations divided Korea into North and South, then Lieutenant General John R. Hodge was in charge of governance of South Korea under American occupation. Even before setting foot on Korean soil "he had instructed his officers to view the Koreans as the enemy."<sup>46</sup> Perhaps he already knew the situation in Korea would eventually come to a head as he shortly after reported to General Douglas MacArthur that "dissatisfaction with the division of the country grows."<sup>47</sup> The dividing of Korea at the 38th parallel was an arbitrary decision with no strategic value other than being easily found on a map. Like many boundaries after WWII, the Korean boundary did not take into consideration the economic makeup of the country. It cleanly split the industrial north and the agricultural south.<sup>48</sup> In addition, the election of American-backed Syngman Rhee allowed the South Korean elite, who had trained under the Japanese, to seize power over both the government and the land. A new form of landholding emerged, enforced by the Korean National Police and the elites of the Korean Democratic Party occupying key government positions.<sup>49</sup> Discontent spread rapidly among the peasant populations, who now had to give up at least half of their rice crop to government organizations.<sup>50</sup>

Then, guerilla warfare broke out in 1948. While it was most noticeable on Cheju Island, the mountainous areas around Yongdong and Hwanggan, where No Gun Ri is located, were not free from fighting. According to a U.S. Central Intelligence Agency estimate, between 3,500 to 6,000 guerrillas were active in South Korea by early 1949.<sup>51</sup> Bateman would have readers believe that all the villagers were supportive of the guerilla fighters, making statements such as “many villagers were at the very least sympathetic to the guerillas, feeding them and providing supplies and shelter at times.”<sup>52</sup> However, the villagers were not always given a choice in providing for the guerrillas. As Bruce Cumings points out, when supplies were low and villagers may be less inclined to part with what little they had, the guerrillas “would attack whole villages and lay them waste in search of supplies.”<sup>53</sup> Long before the North Koreans invaded, South Korea peasants were stuck between two aggressive forces.

“ All they knew of war came from Hollywood movies. ”

While civil unrest was occurring in the South Korea, the North was preparing for an invasion intended to unify the whole Korean peninsula under communism. It is now known that North Korea received extensive aid from the Soviet Union in preparation for the attack. Not only did the Soviet Union give North Korea some of the most modern Soviet weaponry, tanks, aircraft and artillery, the Soviets provided the North Koreans training up until the minute of the invasion.<sup>54</sup> It was chaos in South Korea after the invasion by North Korea as only four ROK divisions were faced with holding off ten North Korean People’s Army (NKPA) divisions.<sup>55</sup> The NKPA was moving swiftly toward Seoul, and the families of the Korean Military Advisory Group (KMAG) staff needed to be evacuated as quickly as possible. The U.S. troops who had recently left were quickly recalled, but not before Seoul was lost. U.S. troops arrived in Taejon on July 2, but even together the U.S. and ROK were unable to hold back the advance of the NKPA.<sup>56</sup>

In addition, the U.S. found itself in a type of war they had not faced since the Philippine-American War at the turn of the century. Guerilla fighting did not stop when North

Korea invaded, and combined with North Korean soldiers who would disguise themselves as peasants to hide from the U.S. and ROK forces. The combined attacks from the NKPA and guerillas greatly contributed to the loss at Taejon and began the U.S. tactic of destroying villages suspected of helping guerillas.<sup>57</sup> The quick setbacks had a profound effect on the morale of the U.S. troops, particularly the loss at Taejon where the U.S. Army’s 24th Infantry Division had a nearly thirty percent casualty rate in addition to the disappearance of Major General William F. Dean.<sup>58</sup> It was shortly after the fall of Taejon when the 1st Cavalry Division arrived in Korea, and took over defense near Yongdong. After this point, the U.S. began to take the threat from the NKPA seriously.

The United States entered the war overconfident, yet unprepared for the realities of war in Korea. General MacArthur claimed on the day North Korea invaded South Korea that he could “handle it with one arm tied behind my back.”<sup>59</sup> All he needed was the 1st Cavalry Division to send the North Koreans scurrying back to the Manchurian border.<sup>60</sup> This infectious view disseminated down the ranks until the majority of soldiers felt confident the war would be over quickly. Private Leonard B. Wenzel thought the war would end after “maybe a couple weeks in Korea... Maybe a couple months.”<sup>61</sup> The soldiers also went into Korea without any idea of the horrors of war. Most of the young men who served in Korea would not have had the benefit of a father who served during World War II to transmit factual information. All they knew of war came from Hollywood movies, showing bloodless death and, possibly more important in the case of the Korean War, a clearly defined enemy.<sup>62</sup> Overconfidence was neither the only nor the worst problem facing the troops, especially those of the 7th Cavalry Regiment.

In addition to overconfidence, the woefully undertrained U.S. troops faced cohesion problems at all levels. While most information is specific to the 7th Cavalry Regiment, it would also apply to any troops stationed and trained in Japan before the Korean War. Based in Tokyo, the 7th

Cavalry Regiment had little room to practice as a group. As John Loppincott, second lieutenant of F Company, 2nd Battalion 7th Cavalry, said “we trained at the squad and platoon, and we were pretty proficient at that, but beyond that we were sorely lacking.”<sup>63</sup> This meant that the members of the 2nd Battalion only trained in groups one-tenth the size of the groups they would have to coordinate and cooperate as in Korea. Perhaps even worse, cohesion issues plagued the 7th Cavalry. As the different units deployed to Korea, officers were shuffled around to fill in gaps. Right until the 7th Cavalry departed Japan the officer situation remained in constant turmoil. Though more pronounced in F Company which rotated through four commanders in the roughly seven months before the war, several other officer positions in the regiment remained unfilled.<sup>64</sup> Young men were thrown together with officers “who had never shared a barracks or a beer” with them before and expected to trust them unconditionally.<sup>65</sup> An example of how the shocking reality of war, undertraining, and cohesion issues combined into larger problems can be seen in a memorandum from the latter half of July. It shows how the 1st Cavalry Division had problems maintaining order of the soldiers: “Elements of the US Cavalry unit fired into friendly troops. They are having a difficult time getting oriented and are trying to straighten out green troops.”<sup>66</sup> The panicked retreat of the 2nd Battalion 7th Cavalry Regiment in their first night of combat is also likely the result of these problems.

The previously mentioned problems would not necessarily lead to the No Gun Ri massacre without one more very important factor. The ‘refugee problem’ is at the epicenter of Korean War atrocities. Newspapers and military documents chronicled the issue well during 1950. In mid-July, a *New York Times* article stated that “hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing before the advancing Red armies clogged the roads of South Korea today.”<sup>67</sup> However, the threat posed by the refugees was more than a problem of congestion on the roads, the military held a firm belief that the refugees were not all they seemed. Many in the U.S. military that both guerilla fighters and North Korean combatants mixed into groups of refugees in order to infiltrate the American lines. This led to strict control measures to ensure no refugee groups would pass

through battle lines. The situation was not as dire as the U.S. military made it out to be, and news reports during the war show that there was acknowledgement of the small numbers of infiltrating enemy combatants.

The allied forces swiftly enacted measures to prevent civilians from coming into contact with U.S. lines, with the South Korean police taking charge of these issues. A July 26, 1950 *New York Times* article laid out the guidelines, the regulations included only two hours of “daily liberty” where civilians were allowed outside of their homes, “strict investigations” of persons moving in large groups, and any person in violation or considered to be making “enemy-like action” would be “executed immediately.”<sup>68</sup> Despite these guidelines the U.S. issued contradictory orders which forced civilians out of their homes, such as the case in Im Gye Ri and Chu Gok Ri. Communication from General William Kean to the 25th Infantry Division mentions that “civilians have been ordered cleared out of the combat zone to the west and north of the line,” while General Walton Walker believed that all civilians should be removed from the combat area making it easy to spot enemy agents as they would be the only ones remaining.<sup>69</sup> These actions were not always undertaken by the South Korean police as policy dictated. Though most archival documentation discussing the movement of refugees specifies it to be handled by the police, a message to the 25th Infantry Division relays that the “First Cav is taking action against the civilians who are remaining in the combat area.”<sup>70</sup> The question should then be asked if the U.S. military actually created the refugee problem. With numerous dispatches during the month of July contradicting each other on what actions to take regarding civilians, it becomes easier to imagine how the situation leading up to No Gun Ri developed.

A more definitive estimate of the number of the refugees flooding toward U.S. and ROK held territory can be found in *South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu*, where Appleman estimates that 380,000 refugees had already entered the territory by mid-July and the number was increasing by 25,000 per day.<sup>71</sup> The Muccio memorandum states that “the refugee problem has developed aspects of a serious and even critical military natures, aside from the



welfare aspects.”<sup>72</sup> The U.S. Army felt the full force of these developments during the battle of Taejon. People dressed as refugees, including women and children, would run toward the American lines as if escaping the battle. Upon a signal, the “refugees” would produce weapons such as firearms or grenades and attack the American troops.<sup>73</sup> Fear of infiltration and guerilla attacks increased the distrust U.S. soldiers felt toward Korean civilians. “Watch those guys in white!” was frequently heard on the front lines.<sup>74</sup> The fear was not completely unfounded. A story circulated among the troops tells how on July 25 a pregnant woman and a man accompanying her were stopped and checked. The woman’s ‘pregnant belly’ actually turned out to be a radio that the pair had used to report U.S. position to the NKPA.<sup>75</sup> Documentation shows that the danger posed by the ‘refugee problem’ was not as critical as the U.S. military made it seem.

The *No Gun Ri Review* claims that “U.S. soldiers new to combat and to the country encountered a war unlike the one fought barely five years earlier in World War II. Guerilla-like tactics reigned, and the threats existed everywhere, even behind enemy lines.”<sup>76</sup> Although guerilla activity occurred during the war, if the CIA’s estimation of 3,500 to 6,000 guerilla fighters is correct, this is far less than the number of North Korean regulars the U.S. Army was facing. When placed in the context of how many refugees existed, even if all the guerilla fighters hid among refugees it would still amount to less than two percent of the total refugees. In addition, it was acknowledged in July 1950 that the guerilla attacks were not as much of a threat as the *No Gun Ri Review* would lead readers to believe. The evidence provided by the Review to back its claim of eminent danger through infiltration mainly comes from hearsay or rumors, with very few examples of actual events.<sup>77</sup> A July 1950 news article explains that while guerilla activity may be increasing near Yongdong, the guerillas had been “virtually wiped out” and “there had hitherto been little sabotage or other activity behind the American lines.”<sup>78</sup> Also, little evidence exists that the presence of the NKPA helped to increase support for communism. A July 16 news article states that most South Koreans actually feared communism after being “conditioned by two years of violent anti-Communist

propaganda,” and that the number of Communist sympathizers among civilians was relatively small.<sup>79</sup> This is confirmed by the fact that Kim Il Sung condemned the communists in South Korea for being unable to raise enough support for an uprising.<sup>80</sup> Ironically, most instances of infiltration actually occurred when the NKPA took advantage of wide gaps in the U.S. lines, allowing them to perform envelopment or turning movements and attacking from the rear.<sup>81</sup> While large numbers of refugees did clog the roads of South Korea, the threat they posed as a means for guerilla fighters to infiltrate U.S. positions was much less than the *Review* would have people believe.

The main question was whether soldiers received orders to fire on refugees at No Gun Ri. The *Review* claims “neither the documentary evidence nor the U.S. veterans’ statements reviewed by the U.S. Review Team support a hypothesis of deliberate killings of Korean civilians.”<sup>82</sup> There are multiple problems with this conclusion. The first being that the idea of an accidental massacre does not fit the details of the event. Perhaps the initial fire was an accident, but it becomes harder to believe that soldiers would continue fire for three days without questioning their actions. Although there is no archival information to support this, the existence of mortar and artillery fire during the three-day incident also throws doubt on the official claim, as both require coordinates for targeting and orders to fire.<sup>83</sup> However, the assertions made in the *No Gun Ri Review* obscure the misdirection and numerous omissions of the report.

The *Review* places emphasis on the fact there is no paper trail to follow. On July 24, 1950, an order was sent to the 8th Cavalry Regiment at 10:00 AM that stated “no refugees to cross the front line. Fire everyone trying to cross lines. Use discretion in case of women and children.”<sup>84</sup> This is the only evidence from before the No Gun Ri incident that directly references an order to open fire on refugees. The Army report makes it seem as though the order was not received by the 7th Cavalry Regiment, but nowhere in the *Review* does it state that the 7th Cavalry’s communication log for July 1950 as been missing since at least 1998.<sup>85</sup> In fact, dates are not listed for documents related to the 7th Cavalry, but dates are provided for previous documents

and continued on the next page.<sup>86</sup> Bateman agrees that the 7th Cavalry could not have received the same order, but he bases his deduction on other the location of the 7th Cavalry at the time when the 8th Cavalry received the order. He claims that as the 2nd Battalion 7th Cavalry was still on the train from Pohang-dong to Hwanggan, they would not have had equipment able to receive the same message.<sup>87</sup> Bateman's deductions sound plausible, but he and the *Review* fail to take into account the orders could have been passed orally to the 2nd Battalion 7th Cavalry after their arrival. Not only did they spend a night camped near headquarters in Hwanggan, when they were sent to the front to relieve the 8th Cavalry, contact was made between the two regiments. The Army report even acknowledged the contact occurred by presenting evidence from the regiment commander.<sup>88</sup> In light of the fact the official report discussed how the headquarters of the Fifth Air Force and Eighth Army were located adjacent to one another to facilitate oral communications and "permitted face-to-face discussions of sensitive matters instead of communicating via paper," the fact that oral communication of the order was not considered is almost laughable.<sup>89</sup>

The same excuse of no paper trail is used to dismiss two documents claiming the Army asked the Air Force and Navy to fire upon refugees. The Rogers Memorandum, dated July 25, 1950, questions the orders that the Air Force should fire on refugee groups. Rogers wrote that "the army has requested that we strafe all civilian refugee parties that are noted approaching our positions" and that "to date, we have complied with the army request in this respect."<sup>90</sup> Although the memo could not be dismissed completely, they chose to leave out the most damning part. To show that the memo is actually against the shooting of refugees, the *Review* summarizes a part of the memo by saying "Rogers argued that the refugee issue was primarily an Army problem and that the Army should screen civilians as they came through the lines."<sup>91</sup> What it leaves out is that Rogers also included "or shooting them as they come through if they desire such action."<sup>92</sup> The Navy document, an action summary from the same date as the Rogers memo, fares slightly better. The *Review* does not omit the line that refugees were strafed

"in accordance with information received from the Army that groups of more than eight to ten people were to be considered troops, and were to be attacked."<sup>93</sup> Instead, the report goes on to say that both documents reference a "single discussion" and North Korean combatants were the intended targets.<sup>94</sup>

While intentionally misconstruing evidence is bad enough on its own, the *Review* Team also completely dismissed evidence that they considered to be a 'smoking gun.' Nowhere in the *Review* is the Muccio Memorandum mentioned. When later questioned about the omission, the Pentagon stated that they examined, but later dismissed, the Muccio document, citing that it was only a proposed plan and not an approved plan.<sup>95</sup> The language used by Muccio proves otherwise. Muccio state that "decisions made" at the meeting between the U.S. and South Koreans included orders, in no uncertain language, that "if refugees do appear from north of US line they will receive warning shots, and if they then persist in advancing they will be shot."<sup>96</sup> On the danger posed by refugees, it states "the Army is determined to end this threat."<sup>97</sup> Muccio uses definitive language throughout the memo, making it shocking that the *Review* Team would view it as unimportant. The Muccio memo is only one of many such omissions that Hanley and Mendoza noted after the *Review* was published. They claim that many documents included in their original articles, documents that contain comments refugees are "fair game" or similar phrases, were intentionally ignored by the *Review* Team.<sup>98</sup> When the omissions and misconstrued evidence are brought to light, it becomes questionable if the U.S. Army ever intended to seek the truth, or if they begin the inquest only intending to clear their own name.

Two documents have the potential to discredit the entire *No Gun Ri Review*. The first, dated July 26, is the GI Journal of the 25th Infantry Division, which records "Incidents, Orders, Messages, etc." At 2200 hours, the GI Journal reports that an order from Major General Kean was received, and it states: "CG (Kean) directed we notify Chief of Police that all civilians moving around in combat zone will be considered as unfriendly and shot."<sup>99</sup> The same order is given by Major General Kean the following day in

a memo to “Commanding Officers, All Regimental Combat Teams” and so on. A map, not included with the document stated, “All civilians seen in this area are to be considered as enemy and action taken accordingly.”<sup>100</sup> Perhaps the order was not actually for soldiers to shoot the refugees, as Kean did not use such language himself, but the soldiers on the ground took it quite differently. Robert M. Carrol, a retired colonel and original interviewee of *The Associated Press*, asked in a subsequent interview

“What do you do when you’re told nobody comes through? We had to shoot them to hold them back.”<sup>101</sup> The large number of refugees left the soldiers with few options as a way to carry out the order from Major General Kean.

The floodgates opened after the decisions listed in the Muccio memorandum went out. The month of August saw an increase in the number of orders referencing shooting of refugees, and these orders continued well into the next year. On August 9, the communications log of the 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment reported an order from ‘Scrappy 6’ that stated, “shoot all refugees coming across river.” Within three minutes, this order was relayed to “Baker and Charlie.”<sup>102</sup> The Journal of the 35th Infantry Regiment 25th Infantry Division reported on August 17 that “any refugee approaching our defense position will be considered the EN and will be dispersed by all available fires including Art.”<sup>103</sup> Then, on August 29 the Unit Journal for the Headquarters 61st Field Artillery Battalion received orders from ‘Saber 6’ that “all refugees on this side of the north firing line are fair game,” and, again, this was quickly relayed to “all batteries in the battalion.”<sup>104</sup> Numerous examples can be found in the Army memorandums, journals, and communication logs. The advice in the Rogers memorandum appears to have been ignored as flight records continued to show a pattern of strafing refugees, and the USS DeHaven September war

diary noted an instance where the Army requested they fire upon “a large group of refugee personnel located on the beach.”<sup>105</sup> These instances of orders to open fire on refugees throw even more doubt on the statement that the Muccio document was only a proposed plan.

The question of whether a direct order was given to fire on refugees at No Gun Ri will probably never be answered unless the 7th Cavalry Regiment’s communication log is located and contains either definitive proof that no order was given or the record of an order to open fire being given. Between the circumstantial evidence and the misdirection of the *No Gun Ri Review*, there is a high possibility that the 7th Cavalry received orders regarding the shooting of refugees before the massacre at No Gun Ri. The Muccio memorandum and the numerous examples of orders to fire on refugees that were discovered points to a theatre-wide<sup>106</sup> policy of shooting refugees as a means of control. Whichever the case, the Korean War remains a brutal war with roughly four million people killed during the short three-year duration, the majority being civilian deaths. Atrocities against civilians were not limited to the United States’ actions, the North Koreans and South Koreans were incredibly brutal against civilians believed to support the other side. The fact that the story of No Gun Ri only came to light forty-nine years after it occurred shows that much more research is needed to uncover the whole truth of what occurred during America’s “forgotten war.”

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