

This Day in History... November 29, 1952

Eisenhower Visits Korea

On November 29, 1952, president-elect Dwight D. Eisenhower filled a campaign promise to visit Korea. He had been critical of Harry Truman's handling of the Korean conflict and promised he would visit and bring an end to the war.

The Korean War had begun on June 25, 1950, when North Korea invaded South Korea. Two days later, US President Harry Truman ordered American troops to help South Korea. Chinese forces then joined the war in support of North Korea in October, and by July 1951, the war became a stalemate. Fighting continued, but neither side gained significant ground.



From the Great Americans Series



From the Distinguished Soldiers issue



Based on 1950 photo of US troops retreating from Chosin Reservoir.



Pictures the Korean War Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC.

war was held to show good faith. Eisenhower changed America's political rhetoric by accepting a limited victory in Korea. The armistice brought an end to the terrible fighting on July 27, 1953, but no peace treaty was ever signed, so the two countries are technically still at war.

1952 was an election year in the US and Harry Truman was considering if he wanted to run for president again. His greatest concern was Dwight D. Eisenhower. Many considered Eisenhower to be the man who beat Hitler as commander of the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force. When Eisenhower eventually decided to run, Truman chose not to run again, and his party selected Illinois Governor Adlai Stevenson as their candidate.

During the campaign for president, Eisenhower said he could end the war in Korea, promising to deal with "Korea, Communism, and Corruption." With his impressive military background, most Americans believed Eisenhower could end the war and he led in most of the polls.

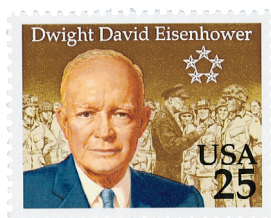
Eisenhower criticized Truman's failure to end the war, leading Truman to challenge Eisenhower to offer a better plan. Two weeks before the election, Eisenhower announced that if he was elected, he would go to Korea himself and develop a plan to end the conflict.

Eisenhower's promises struck a chord with voters, and he won by a landslide. Then within weeks of his election, Eisenhower traveled to Korea on November 29, 1952. He brought several advisors, including Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Omar Bradley. The president-elect visited troops on the frontlines and spoke with their commanders. Despite the bitter cold, Eisenhower examined the terrain and witnessed an artillery duel. He also got to see his son John, who was serving at the front.

During his trip, Eisenhower flew over the 38th parallel to look at the Chinese and North Korean defenses. Seeing the rocky terrain, he knew that a direct assault wouldn't win the war. The trip to Korea was eye-opening for Eisenhower – he realized his troops couldn't fight their way to victory. He also realized that without a diplomatic solution, it would take atomic weapons to end the war, and he didn't want to do that. He later said, "We could not tolerate the indefinite continuance of the Korean conflict. The United States would have to prepare to break the stalemate."

Eisenhower put pressure on both sides to reach an agreement in the truce negotiations. He suggested that the Nationalist Chinese forces in Taiwan could attack the communist Chinese, and said he would use any force necessary, including nuclear weapons, to end the war. Following the death of Soviet leader Josef Stalin in March 1953, his successors grew concerned that the US might resort to nuclear weapons. The Soviets then persuaded the North Koreans and Chinese to agree to the armistice.

Peace negotiations in Korea finally began to make progress, and the communists accepted the United Nations' proposals. An exchange of sick and injured prisoners of



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Stevenson lost to Eisenhower again in the 1956 election.



Stamp issued seven months after Eisenhower died.

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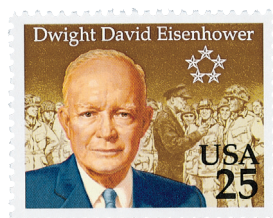
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