



**VOICES OF VETERANS**

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## **Voices of Veterans**

# **Korean War Oral History Lesson Plan**

Drawing from oral history interviews with Bud Farrell, John Latta, William Yoss, and Dallas Shannon

## Suggested Grade

High School  
TEKS HIS 8(A)(C)

Caution: Some of the full-length VOV oral history interviews might contain adult content or offensive language. Teacher discretion is advised.

**Time Required:** 1-2 class periods depending on amount of discussion time (plus lesson extension assignment)

## Guiding Questions

What is oral history? What can we learn from oral histories that we cannot learn from written sources? How might oral histories be less useful than the written record?

What do the oral histories of Korean War veterans tell us about the Korean War and early years of the Cold War?

## Objectives

Understand some of the contributions and limitations of oral histories as a primary source

Have a better understanding of some of the military and political complexities of the Korean War.

## Needed for the Activity

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- Oral history excerpts sheet
- Lesson plan activity worksheet
- Pencil or pen
- A map of the Korean peninsula during the conflict (suggested, but not required)

## Activity Instructions

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- Distribute the oral history excerpts and activity worksheet to students
- Initiate oral history warm up exercise (see below)
- Model the first excerpt questions and note-taking activity. After each excerpt is read, provide time for the students, in small groups, to discuss and write their answers to the questions and observations on the notes part of the activity worksheet.
- After all observations and answers have been recorded lead the students in a class discussion of the activity questions and excerpt questions.

### *Warm Up Activity (8 minutes)*

- Ask the students what the terms Cold War, civil war, proxy war, and forgotten war mean to them. Ideally, students should have some familiarity with one or more these concepts already, to varying degrees, from previous lessons and/or readings. Write down the characteristics they give for each. Help with definitions as needed.
- Ask the students to share their impressions of the Korean War. If they do not have many, or any at all, ask them why they think they have heard more about other conflicts than this one. Discuss the following as a class:

- The Korean War was a part of the Cold War, a civil war, a proxy war between the United States and the Soviet Union, and to a large extent a forgotten war in the U.S.
- Familiarize the students with the concept that while the documentary record for the Korean War is vast, we also know a lot from recorded oral histories of veterans who fought in the war, and that these first-person recollections are what we call oral history.

## Lesson Extension

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Students put together a project on a Korean War-related topic that utilizes oral history content from the Voices of Veterans collection. The project can take a variety of forms depending on teacher approval and the skills and interests of the student. Some potential examples:

- Short graphic novella
- Podcast episode
- Journal entries or series of letters from the perspective of a military service member in Korea
- An essay answering a prompt of the teacher's choosing
- Designing a local Korean War memorial or monument

# Potential Vietnam War Discussion / Project Topics

Mobilization and deployment (the draft, voluntary enlistment, combat rotations)

Combat conditions, battles, MIAs and POWs

Media coverage of the war

Training (Basic, Advanced, & Specialist)

Relationship between U.S. forces, other UN nations' forces, and South Korean forces

Development of U.S. policy of containment in the Cold War

Impressions of Korea (arrival, day-to-day, interaction with civilians, weather, environment, etc.)

Racial integration of the U.S. military in 1948 via Executive Order 9981

Mental and physical health post-war (PTSD, wartime injuries)

Down time/R&R, USO events

President Truman's firing of General MacArthur (reasons, public opinion, impact)

Role of China and the Soviet Union

Accidents/wounds/illness, medical treatments and protocols, Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (MASH) units

Korean Armistice Agreement, ongoing significance of the 38th parallel, current state of affairs on the Korean peninsula

The Korean War Memorial in Washington D.C.

## Lesson Notes for the Educator

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Some potential topics to explore with the students in the group discussions:

- Throughout history, written records (newspapers, government documents, letters, private journals, autobiographies, maps, etc.) have disproportionately been created by those with power and wealth. As valuable as they are as historical sources, they provide only a limited window into what majorities of people thought and did in the past. Oral histories provide a democratizing balance by letting ordinary people speak for themselves. It also allows historians to learn about details of the past that no one at the time saw a need to commit to paper. Like documents, however, they have their limits: memories can be distorted versions of the truth, filled with inaccuracies or bias. People can withhold vital information because they are not comfortable sharing details, or the right questions were never asked. And one person's experience or interpretation is not necessarily representative or the only viewpoint on the subject.
- In order to understand the Korean conflict (1950-1953), students should make connections to post-WWII events between 1945 and 1950. These include the post-war Soviet occupation of parts of Europe and Asia, Truman Doctrine, Berlin airlift, creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the United Nations (U.N.), and the Chinese Revolution of 1949.
- While U.S. war objectives are carried out by the military commanders, the civilian commander in chief, the U.S. President, is in charge. Civil-military relations have not always been smooth or without friction (notable example: President Lincoln's search for commanding generals to lead Union forces in the Civil War). Truman's clash with General MacArthur highlights the broader geopolitical considerations which, as president, Truman had to deal with beyond the fighting in Korea: particularly, a powerful Soviet Union emerging as a rival superpower and the spread of communism.



# FIRSTHAND ORAL HISTORY (EXCERPTS)

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As you read the firsthand excerpts of each Korean War veteran, write down your observations on the activity worksheet. Be prepared to discuss as a class after all excerpts are finished.

# Excerpt 1: Bud Farrell

Voices of Veterans Oral History Interview  
(June 12, 2014)

 Recorded Interview (1:10:43): [voicesofveterans.org/oral-history/farrell](https://voicesofveterans.org/oral-history/farrell)



## Farrell Interview

June 12, 2014

**Bud Farrell (U.S. Air Force) (44:12 – 45:51):** "...During World War II, they usually had a set number, a limit on [combat flight] missions. Twenty-five, then they increased it to 35 [required combat missions]. We didn't have a set number. I didn't even realize this when I was there [in Korea]. We had a set six-month combat tour, to the day. We got there June 21st and we left December 21st. It was a couple of years later I was reading a book about the U.S. Air Force in Korea. They talked about the organization of the Air Force then, you know. It started in '47, split off from the Army...They had downgraded the Air Force, all the militaries, so greatly [after World War II]. They [then] were trying to rebuild the forces as quickly as they could. And of course, most of those skills, they weren't like an infantryman who might be trained in a couple of months. Might be, you know, tough on those guys, but the navigators and most of those were skills greater than even the gunner, by far. Pilots, navigators, bombardiers. So they recalled all those guys that had been at the end of World War II. They were recalled and not real happy. There were some of them that refused to fly. They came back from World War II, started families, and professions and businesses and jobs. And all of a sudden they're yanked back in, they're leaving a wife and little kids, homes. They had it really tough, you know. We didn't. We were all single kids, you know."

- Between the end of WWII (1945) and the beginning of the Korean War (1950), what changes in the U.S. military does Farrell refer to? What challenges do you think these presented?
- Why does Farrell think WWII aviation veterans who also served in the Korean War had a harder time than younger recruits and draftees?

# Excerpt 2: John Latta

Voices of Veterans Oral History Interview  
(November 15, 2017)

 Recorded Interview (39:06): [voicesofveterans.org/oral-history/latta](https://voicesofveterans.org/oral-history/latta)



## Latta Interview

November 15, 2017

**John Latta (U.S. Marines) (14:50 – 17:01):** “After we took Inchon and Seoul, the Army wanted to consolidate the North and South Korea because we had beat the North Korean Army and they wanted to eliminate the 38th parallel, so they sent the Marines around to the other coast, and we were to go in and then go up into the mountains to the Chosen Reservoir, the Yalu River, which was the Chinese border. And O.P. Smith, the Marine general—it’s taught now in officers’ training, the battle that we did coming out of there—but anyhow, we started up into those mountains, and it’s good elevation, to say the least. It’s 30 to 60 [degrees Fahrenheit] below zero, depending on the time of day, and those thirteen thousand Marines...we’re fighting our way up there. And we kept telling the [U.S.] Army that we’re surrounded with a 120,000 Chinese with orders to wipe us out, and the Army kept saying, ‘Hell, no, it’s just a token force.’ And they finally agreed, and the Army general flew up into the Marine camp and told O.P. Smith to drop everything and run for it, and O.P. Smith said, ‘Hell, no,’ and we turned around and fought our way out of there. Best as I remember, I’m not quite sure [of] the figure but something like 45,000 Chinese on the way in. We lost three thousand of our guys, and six thousand [Americans] wounded, and everybody had frostbite, and things of that nature.”

- How would you describe or summarize the difficulties faced by U.S. and U.N. military forces in the Battle of Chosin Reservoir?
- What do U.S. military objectives appear to be? How do you think the presence of the Chinese Army in the Korean peninsula complicated the overall war objectives?

# Excerpt 3: William Yoss

Voices of Veterans Oral History Interview  
(August 2, 2017)



 Recorded Interview (30:08): [voicesofveterans.org/oral-history/Yoss](https://voicesofveterans.org/oral-history/Yoss)

## Yoss Interview

August 2, 2017

**William Yoss (U.S. Army) (13:27 – 15:03):** Battle/area he served in: “It was mainly for control of the Ch'orwon Valley because that was a natural pass to come out of the area of North Korea and into South Korea because between the two countries there was a natural range of mountains and this was the main pass that had been a trade route for centuries. So that was the main place we were defending. We had been up as far—when they were going back and forth before [U.S. General Douglas] MacArthur got relieved [of command]—they'd been up as far as the Yalu River, and MacArthur, in his arrogance, I might say, wanted to go on in and bring Red China into it and everything. Of course, they didn't want to start World War III... That's when MacArthur got relieved and then [General Matthew] Ridgway came in and took over. Ridgway, I felt, was a much better general because he says, 'Let's give 'em bullets instead of bayonets'. In other words, he wanted to use long-range artillery which we had superior force with instead of trying to go up there and sacrifice some troops. Then they started the Panmunjeom peace talks, and they have never settled that yet. I mean, it's still in limbo to this day.”

- What does Yoss mean when he says U.S. leadership did not want to start World War III? What factors made that a fear at the time?
- What do U.S. military objectives appear to be? Does Yoss believe that the U.S.'s political objectives were achieved?

# Excerpt 4: Dallas Shannon

Voices of Veterans Oral History Interview  
(August 5, 2010)

 Recorded Interview (56:52): [voicesofveterans.org/oral-history/shannon](https://voicesofveterans.org/oral-history/shannon)

## Shannon Interview

August 5, 2010

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**Dallas Shannon (U.S. Army) (25:31 – 26:32):** "...The Second World War ended and people referred to [the Korean conflict] pretty much as a police action. I don't think United States ever declared war on anybody during the Korean War, but they wound up with infantry units over there, they wound up with a lot of different countries sent in men, and I think totally there was, even I think there was something like 38,000 [American] men that were either killed, wounded...People, they didn't think much about it really, and until it started, most people didn't even know where Korea was."

- How might the experiences of Korean War veterans have differed from their WWII counterparts?
- What impact might the lack of a declaration of war, and a lack of a treaty resolving the conflict, have had on the long-term American perceptions of the conflict?

# ACTIVITY WORKSHEET

VOICES OF VETERANS

	Bud Farrell	John Latta	William Yoss	Dallas Shannon
Major/important details				
Unfamiliar names, words, phrases, or acronyms				
What stood out to you and why?				
What do you want to know more about?				

## End of Class Reflection Questions

Lead the students in a group discussion and ask them to reflect on the Korean War veterans' experiences by sharing the observations on their activity worksheet and their answers to the excerpt questions. In particular:

1. To what extent did communist China's involvement in the Korean peninsula, and U.S. concerns about the Soviet Union, complicate U.S. military and political decisions?
2. The Korean Armistice Agreement (a ceasefire) was signed July 27, 1953, but no permanent diplomatic settlement has ever been reached between the governments of North and South Korea. Did the Korean War "end" in 1950?
3. The Korean conflict that began on June 25, 1950, has been called the Korean War, a Cold War proxy war, a United Nations police action, and "the forgotten war" in the United States. In China, its official name is the War to Resist America and Aid Korea. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) calls it the Fatherland Liberation War, and the Republic of Korea (South Korea) refers to it as Six-Two-Five (the date it began). What do each of these names reveal about the different ways this conflict can be viewed?