

## 3.4 The Korean War

map and photos of the Korean War



Maps and  
Graphs



Digital  
Library

**Main Idea** After three years of war, North Korea and South Korea remained divided.

When the Japanese occupation ended in 1945, the Korean Peninsula was divided along the 38° North latitude line—usually referred to as the **38th parallel**. The United States held the land south of that line, and the Soviet Union occupied the land to the north. The United States and the Soviet Union came to be locked in a **Cold War**. This means that they did not fight one another directly in battle. Instead, they supported opposing groups in wars that took place in other parts of the world. One such war occurred in Korea.

### Fighting Begins

In 1947, the United Nations called for free elections that would create one government for Korea. The elections were held, but the Soviet Union stepped in and established a Communist government in the north. The following year, Communist North Korea and democratic South Korea were created, with the 38th parallel serving as the border.

On June 25, 1950, North Korea attacked South Korea. The United Nations called for an international force to come to South Korea's aid. The United States supplied most of the troops and placed them under the command of General Douglas MacArthur, who had been an important military leader during World War II.

The fighting wore on for several years. At one point, the North Koreans pushed deep into South Korea and captured most of the peninsula. Then the UN forces made a surprise landing at Inchon and took back the South Korean capital of Seoul. As the North Koreans **retreated**, or drew back, the UN forces pushed north and captured the North Korean capital of Pyongyang. The course of the war shifted from one side to the other through 1952, but in the end, little territory was gained or lost.

### Impact of the War

As many as four million soldiers and civilians were killed in the war. Much of the Korean Peninsula was damaged by bombs dropped by jet aircraft.



Korean civilians particularly suffered during the war. Half of all industries and a third of all homes were destroyed. In addition, many people died of starvation.

### The War Ends

In 1953, the UN forces and North Korea signed an **armistice**, or agreement to stop fighting, but a treaty was never signed. An area set near the 38th parallel, called the demilitarized zone (DMZ), still divides the two countries today. Since 1953, North Korean troops have guarded one side of the zone, while South Korean and American troops have guarded the other.

Today, Communist North Korea is largely isolated from the rest of the world, while South Korea is a democracy with a global, market economy. Over the years, the two countries have discussed the possibility of uniting. However, political differences and the threat of North Korea's nuclear arms program have made this unification increasingly unlikely.

### Before You Move On

**Make Inferences** What, if anything, did the