

Fights Acid Action

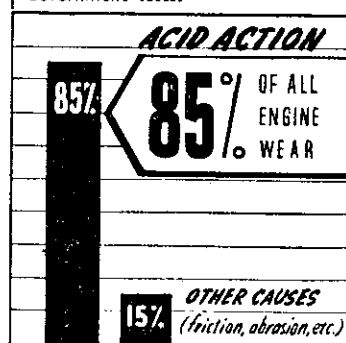
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(contributing causes of engine wear)

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The War That Nobody Wanted

THE truce in Korea may not mean the end of the war; but the guns are silent, and a peaceful settlement has become possible. It has been a strange war, much tougher than might have been supposed when the news came thinly, and yet never quite cut off from political negotiation. Both sides knew what must happen if the fighting could not be contained in that bleak and rugged peninsula. The Communists had hoped to seize the whole country in a short campaign. From the moment that the United Nations decided to resist aggression the danger most to be feared was in the spread of the war. This danger became acute when Communist China intervened. The dismissal of General MacArthur, whose strategic aims might have committed the United Nations fatally in Asia, was followed by hard fighting which can now be seen as a crisis in the war. In April and May, 1951, the Communists mounted heavy offensives. They were pushed back, and by the end of May a stable line was being formed a little to the north of the 38th Parallel. Soon afterwards, in June, 1951, a Soviet spokesman suggested that "the problem of armed conflict in Korea could be settled."

The United Nations had been ready from the beginning to work for peace. As early as December 14, 1950, a Cease-Fire Group was set up by the General Assembly. A new declaration of aims was made in the hope that Russia would agree to armistice talks, but all overtures were ignored until it could be seen that the military alternatives were a stalemate in Korea or a movement towards total war. When at last the negotiations opened they proved to be one of the most tedious and frustrating chapters in political history. The war lasted three years and a month, and for at least two-thirds of that time the delegates were trying to arrange a truce. These talks were not continuous: they were broken off, resumed, and suspended again. Cabled reports, at first given prominence in newspapers, subsided to obscure positions, and were read or passed over in sceptical

silence. Yet progress was made, very slowly, until the only remaining problem was the repatriation of prisoners. This led to a new series of frustrations; and the last hopes for a settlement seemed to disappear when an Indian compromise plan was rejected by Russia at the end of 1952. Then Stalin's death changed the situation with dramatic suddenness. An exchange of sick and wounded prisoners, the resumption of talks at Panmunjom, and finally an agreement on repatriation, prepared us for an announcement that an armistice was to be signed. Even then there was to be a last deferment. The opposition of Dr. Syngman Rhee, President of the South Korean Republic, flared into open defiance with the release of many thousands of anti-Communist prisoners of war. The fact that this crisis could be overcome showed how strongly the desire for peace was shared in both camps.

Few people will believe that a final peace can be reached quickly or held securely. The Koreans are sharply divided, and ruthlessness on both sides has left wounds that will heal slowly. Beyond Korea, but inseparable from its future, is the problem of China. The United Nations have so far been unable to agree on the recognition of the Communist regime. British spokesmen have said that a refusal to face the facts in Asia is unrealistic, though lately a hint was given that in the meantime the Government's view would not be pressed. This issue touches the policy of the United States, whose armed forces have had the hardest fighting and heaviest casualties in Korea. Also doubtful is the attitude of Russia, though recent events have encouraged hopes that the new policy will be more flexible than Stalin's. Meanwhile the world has escaped a great danger. The lives lost in Korea, the destruction and the suffering, are a sufficiently heavy price to pay for peace. Aggression was a tragic mistake; but it has not been allowed to grow into a third world war. And the long negotiations have shown that, no matter how great the difficulties may be, they can be overcome.

N.Z. LISTENER, AUGUST 7, 1953,