

The Cold War

LITERATURE READING

Fighting in Korea

In 1950 Curtis Morrow, a 17-year-old African American, enlisted in the U. S. Army. A few months later the Korean War broke out. Private Morrow immediately volunteered for combat duty and was assigned to the 24th Infantry Regiment, the Army's only all-black regiment. The following excerpt is from Curtis J. Morrow's What's a Commie Ever Done to Black People? A Korean War Memoir of Fighting in the U.S. Army's Last All Negro Unit. As you read the excerpt, think about the irony of an African American man fighting for democracy in a segregated unit.

My first night of combat was spent evading the CCF [avoiding the Chinese Communist Forces], whom we occasionally glimpsed as they dashed along the ridges of the hills on our flanks [sides]. They were trying to encircle us and set up ambushes. Since we were in the lowland rice paddies, they couldn't see us.

I was tired and sleepy. The rice paddy we negotiated was partially frozen over. There were patches where it wasn't solid, and to break through would mean a boot full of water. And the noise could draw enemy fire. This could be avoided by maintaining one's footing on the narrow ridge that crisscrossed the rice paddy. The problem was we would occasionally doze while walking, causing us to miss our footing and slip off the embankment into the partially frozen rice paddy. The resulting noise would bring sharp reprisals [warnings] from some noncommissioned officer (NCO) and the men in general; such noise jeopardized the safety of all. . . .

"First Squad, over here," someone ordered in a whisper. I followed the man in front of me to the rallying point a few yards off the path we were walking. There we were told we were going to surprise a surprise party and to remove the safeties on our weapons. We were also warned not to fire until ordered. We again made our

way in pitch darkness. I could only make out the outline of the soldier in front of me.

When he suddenly stopped, I nearly kept walking right into him. But then, as he had done, I too signaled the man behind me to stop. About fifty yards to our front, I could see what I guessed to be part of a road. Looking up, I noticed the moon emerging from dark clouds that had previously concealed it.

Next, I heard the explosion of a hand grenade, and everyone began firing their weapons at once. Instantly the air was filled with whining sounds of enemy bullets as they searched the air above our heads.

It was over within seconds; but during that time I had fired off an eight round clip, reloaded, and fired off two more rounds before word came to cease firing. As I passed the enemy bunker that we (members of the 1st and 2nd Squad) had just wiped out, I could make out the bodies of three enemy soldiers.

It was my first engagement with my designated [appointed] enemy. I don't recall how I felt, if indeed, I felt anything. I only knew I was . . . cold and sleepy and just wished I could curl up by the side of the road somewhere and sleep. . . .

As we walked along a narrow path leading toward wherever or to whatever waited in my future (if I had one), I would occasionally glimpse up at the distant crimson horizon, made fiery red by exploding bombs being dropped from night bombers. My thoughts momentarily drifted back to a ninth-grade history class I had attended last year. The subject had been the conditions under which Francis Scott Key had written "The Star-Spangled Banner." I also thought of Crispus Attucks, the first black man to die in the war for American independence; he was one of my childhood heroes. But then there were others, many others. They were always there, throughout our history in America, and always

eager to serve our country. In fact, we are the only race that had to fight for the rights to fight.

Now it was my turn to fight for freedom, liberty, and justice for all. Not paying attention to where I was putting my feet I again lost my footing and fell from the narrow pathway we were following across the rice paddy. The next instant I was on my back, lucky I hadn't broken through the solid ice. I quickly got to my feet and was sternly warned by the squad leader of the importance of staying alert and of moving as quietly as possible. . . .

A few hours later, during a break, I was singled out by our platoon sergeant. . . .

"Where you from soldier?" he asked.

"Chicago," I answered.

"Well, I'm from Mississippi," he said as he squatted beside me. "You know the town where I was born, I am not even allowed to vote? My kids can't even attend a decent school or ride the public transportation except in a segregated section, although we are expected to pay our share of taxes. We can't even go into a restaurant and expect to be treated like human beings.

And any white person can do anything they like to a black person, and there be nothing we could do to get justice." With that he paused for a moment to let it sink in.

"So, if you want to stay alive, soldier, forget about all that patriotic, liberty, justice, and freedom for all. . . . That's another fight we'll have to deal with when, or if, we return to America. Here, we are fighting for our lives. And the best chance we have of surviving this war is to stick together, so stay alert, soldier." Having said that, he stood, peeped at his watch in the darkness, and said, "You men better get ready; we'll be moving out in ten minutes." Then he turned and walked out of the bombed-out building. It was my introduction to the realities of war, as it applied to us black Americans.

From "Korea, December 4, 1950" from *What's a Commie Ever Done to Black People?: A Korean War Memoir of Fighting in the U.S. Army's Last All Negro Unit* by Curtis James Morrow. Copyright © 1997 by Curtis James Morrow. Reprinted by permission of **McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, Jefferson, NC 28640, www.mcfarlandpub.com**.

■ UNDERSTANDING WHAT YOU READ After you have finished reading the selection, answer the following questions in the space provided.

1. How did Private Morrow feel after his first engagement with the enemy?

2. Of what did the exploding bombs remind Morrow?

3. What advice does the platoon sergeant give Private Morrow about how to survive the Korean War?

4. What were the "realities of war" that the platoon sergeant introduced to Morrow?

■ ACTIVITY

Interview a relative or neighbor who fought in a war. Ask them about the war they fought in and their feelings about fighting. Then use this information to write a short magazine article about soldiers' experiences in war.

3. the rising tides of the river, drowning them
4. He was angry at the doctors and crew of the naval hospital ship because it was not coming to help the victims. He was also angry at the doctors at the Army medical unit because they would not come to Asano Park and the riverbank to help the dying people.
5. Mr. Tanimoto became angry at himself. Answers should explain that he had promised people he would bring medical help, and “They might die feeling cheated.” He came to realize that the number of injured people and limited medical help would not allow him to keep his promise.

ACTIVITY

Students’ letters will vary but should draw upon the information in the selection.

PRIMARY SOURCE

1. Peggy Terry and her husband were living day to day, moving around and working wherever they could find work.
2. She had money to buy shoes and a dress, and to pay rent and put food on the table.
3. She had only vague knowledge, and did not really think about it. This was just after the depression, and she lived in a poor, rural area. She was focused on just “stayin’ alive” and being happy to have work.
4. He fought in France, North Africa, and Germany, as a paratrooper.
5. He had started having nightmares, and shaking at the thought or sight of shooting.
6. Answers will vary but should explain how Terry came to see and understand the bigger picture, that many people died in the war and that both she and her husband played a role in that.

ACTIVITY

Students’ charts should reflect an understanding of the various roles of these women in building weapons to supply the fighting, as workers versus managers, as the primary breadwinners, and as responsible for the home and children. Comparisons to women’s

roles today could include military service, business/management, child care and custody, and changes in family dynamics.

BIOGRAPHY

1. Fermi and his fellow researchers inadvertently split the atom, which led the way to future atomic fission technology.
2. He was totally against the development of the hydrogen bomb because he saw its destructive power as virtually absolute. Students’ reactions will vary.
3. Students’ speculations will vary, but should suggest that Italy would have been extremely powerful if that were the case.
4. Answers will vary but should demonstrate an understanding that some scientific information can be helpful as well as detrimental.

ACTIVITY

Students’ articles should demonstrate an understanding of the awesome power demonstrated by Fermi’s research. The interview should reflect both Fermi’s accomplishments and his misgivings concerning what might happen if a more powerful bomb could be built.

CHAPTER 28

LITERATURE

1. He doesn’t remember if he felt anything at all; he just remembers being cold and sleepy.
2. Crispus Attucks and other African Americans who had fought in wars and fought for the right to fight for freedom and democracy in America
3. to forget about patriotism and stick together and stay alert
4. The “realities of war” were that African Americans were fighting for their lives, not for “liberty, justice, and freedom for all.”

ACTIVITY

Students’ magazine articles should explain what war the person they interviewed fought in, what that person felt about fighting from that person’s point of view.