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Fight, Dig and Live: The Story of the Royal Engineers in the Korean War

George Cooper

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The Korean War, which began with an unprovoked attack by North Korea in 1950, went on for three long years. Over 100,000 soldiers of the United Nations forces, including those of the Republic of Korea, were killed and three times that number wounded. United Kingdom casualties amounted to some 300 Officers and 4,000 Other Ranks.

The Royal Engineers deployed a Field Squadron to Korea in the Autumn of 1950 and this was expanded to a Regiment the following year. Involved in fierce fighting, the Sappers suffered grievous casualties including 42 killed and several hundred wounded. Their gallantry was rewarded by numerous gallantry awards, including two DSOs, thirteen MCs, (one by the author), eight MMs and the most distinguished of all, a Distinguished Conduct Medal, second only to the Victoria Cross.

It was a vicious war whose intensity never slackened and in the last two months alone the Communist artillery fired over 700,000 rounds against 4.7 million fired back by the United Nations. The Royal Engineers were involved at all levels, from patrols and minefields, to defense works and, providing support to all manner of operations such as transportation, bridging and the important provision of postal services, so vital for morale.

Inevitably, though, the focus in that of a war like Korea is often on sapper participation in the forward area where they were often involved in close-quarter fighting with the enemy. Sappers certainly lived up to the title of this book: Fight, Dig and Live.

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