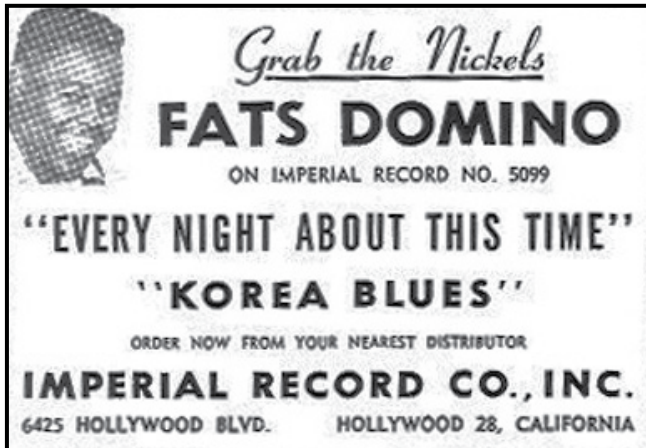


“I got my questionnaire and they need me in the war”

By Tony Burke



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From Galen Gart's First Pressings.

When Bear Family were preparing their new four CD box set, 'Battleground Korea: Songs And Sounds Of America's Forgotten War', little did the label know that sixty years after the start of the war the most unlikely events took place.

The magnificent hard cover book which accompanies this set, alludes to the recent insults traded between President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un which had reached dangerous levels.

However a meeting between two of the most unpredictable men on the planet took place in Singapore on 12th June. Not much seems to have come of the meeting. Nobody can predict what any final outcome will be.

The actual war in Korea took place between 25th June 1950 and 27th July 1953 – resulting in a stalemate, which has continued for 65 years.

Although dubbed (in the box set title) as 'America's Forgotten War', the Korean War formed a major backdrop of early 1950s American history as well as musical history.

The U.S.A. was fighting a war just five years after the defeat of fascism and the ending of the Second World War. The U.S. public was still war weary – some of the tracks here bear witness to that. For many U.S. citizens it was a war that was unwanted, some were resigned to a long drawn out conflict, but for others – especially right wing politicians and the right wing U.S. media – it was a chance to ramp up jingoism and anti-Communist propaganda, and even threaten a nuclear holocaust.

With over 120 tracks we get the full range of U.S. music – blues, rhythm and blues, country, folk, bluegrass, gospel and pop – and the box features well-known stars and unknowns covering all of these genres.

The four discs each have a different theme and are chronologically ordered over the period of the five 'phases' of the conflict.



From the B&R Archive.

Disc one features songs related to 'Going To War'; disc two 'In Korea' covers the experiences of actually being in the conflict; 'On The Homefront' is disc three's theme and disc four covers the ending of the war and explores 'Peace And Its Legacies'.

The discs includes several short 'narrative song-cycles', for instance on 'On The Homefront' we get 'A Dear John Letter' followed by 'John's Reply', 'Dear Joan' and 'Forgive Me John.'

Another set of songs goes from 'Please Daddy, Don't Go To War' to 'Why Does the Army Need My Daddy', 'God Bless My Daddy' and 'Don't Steal Daddy's Medal'. The 'Peace And Its Legacies' disc strings together songs which start with 'Leavin' Korea' and ends with 'Back Home'.

There is also a pairing of similar songs. Arthur 'Big Boy' Crudup's 'The War Is Over' is followed by Lightnin' Hopkins' version. B.B. King's 'Questionnaire Blues' ("I got my questionnaire and they need me in the war") precedes John Lee Hooker's version of a similar song. Now considered a B.B. King classic, this 1951 recording by King was originally unissued.

Blues-wise, disc one contains versions of 'Korea Blues' by Fats Domino, Clifford Blivens with the Johnny Otis Band, and Willie Brown, as well as featuring Lightnin' Hopkins on 'War News Blues', The Four Barons' 'Got To Go Back Again', Sunnyland Slim's 'Back To Korea Again' (all from 1950); Max 'Blues' Bailey's 'Sorry Girl Blues', Sonny Thompson's 'Uncle Sam Blues' from 1951; Lloyd Price's 'Mailman Blues' and Crudup's 'Mr. So And So' from 1952. The second set features



CHILDREN'S CRUSADE AGAINST COMMUNISM
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FIGHT THE RED MENACE
 © 1951 Boynton-Gum, Inc. Phila., Pa. U.S.A.

From unknown source.

gospel by the Gospel Pilgrims from 1951 (who were advertised in an Atlantic advert as being the Gospel Travelers and who may have been the Otis Jackson Quartet), Sherman 'Blues' Johnson's 'Lost In Korea' from 1953 and Lightnin' Hopkins' desperately moving 'Sad News From Korea', cut in 1953, and J.B. Lenoir's 'I'm In Korea' from 1954.

The third disc has tracks by Max Bailey (as Little Maxie), on the pounding 'Drive Soldier Drive', waxed for Excello in 1953; the Emmitt Slay Trio's comedy number, 'Male Call', singer Ray Snead, (who cut 'Fade Away Baby' in 1951 after MacArthur's farewell speech to the U.S. Congress, when he told Congress that "Old soldiers never die – they just fade away" – Snead originally called the song 'Do The MacArthur Baby'); while Cecil Gant sings his tear jerker, 'God, Bless My Daddy', cut in 1953, from a nine-year-old child's point of view. Gospel gets a look-in with sixteen-years-old Edna McGriff's 'Heavenly Father', issued by Jubilee – a song covered by white pop artists Delores Hawkins and The Four Lads on Okeh, and Fran Warren on MGM

Disc four, the aftermath of the war, features Sister Rosetta Tharpe's 'Peace In Korea' and Crudup's 'The War Is Over', followed by a Lightnin' Hopkins' number of the same name, Soldier Boy (Lawyer) Houston's 'Leavin' Korea', King Perry's 'Welcome Home Baby' and tracks by Dave Bartholomew, 'No More Black Nights', and Jimmy Witherspoon, 'Back Home'.

Of course there are plenty of sides by country, hillbilly and bluegrass artists including Ernest Tubb, the Delmore Brothers, Harry Choates, Hank Penny, Gene Autry, Skeets McDonald, the Louvin Brothers, Jim and Jesse and many others.

What's more, Bear Family has dug deep and has come up with some real country obscurities. Where else would you hear Hank Harral and His Palomino Cowhands do 'When They Raised The U.N. Flag In South Korea', Cactus Pryor and His Pricklypears' '(In Again, Out Again) Packing Up My Barracks Bags Blues', and the deadly serious and jingoistic 'When They Drop The Atomic Bomb' from Jackie Doll and His Pickled Peppers?

All this alongside excerpts of speeches by the egotistical General Douglas MacArthur (including parts of his address to the U.S. Congress after President Truman relieved him of his command after a public row over the bombing of China), speeches by Presidents Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower, radio news and comment, on the spot field reports and public service announcements from the likes of crooner Vic Damone and cartoon character Howdy Dowdy. Complete with a sturdy 160 page, full colour book, with notes from music scholar Hugo A. Keeping with Bill



Marilyn Monroe in Korea - 'a tonic for the troops'. Unknown source.

Gerhard, the book has detailed information on each song and recording artist as well as full lyrics and an index.

It is wonderfully illustrated with hundreds of vintage photographs, flyers, advertisements, record labels and covers, magazines, chewing gum cards (from the Children's Crusade Against Communism), news cuttings and other memorabilia as well as anti U.S.A. propaganda.

There is a foreword by country singer Frankie Miller about his service in Korea and a section with rare photographs of Marilyn Monroe's visit to entertain U.S. troops fighting in the war and there is a detailed history of the conflict including its four phases and the armistice.

This is a stunning box set and document, produced in the best traditions of the long history of Bear Family box sets.

The Korean conflict may be a mystery to some, but the music here, combined with the sheer quality of production should attract Grammy nominations when they come round.


'Battleground Korea: Songs And Sounds Of America's Forgotten War' – a four CD set with hardcover booklet is issued by Bear Family (BCD 71158).

For further reading and research on blues music and the Korean War see 'The Truman and Eisenhower Blues' and its accompanying CD on Agram Blues published and released in 2004 (see reviews in B&R 190).



From the B&R Archive.


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