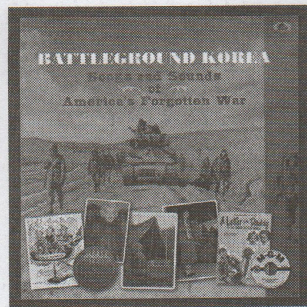


the new decade got underway. More typical was the diaspora spinning off punk's axis: the Pretenders' marriage of pogo-worthy powerchords to Chrissie Hynde's classic pop songwriting and emotive vocals, or Adam & the Ants' evolution from S&M-themed sub-Pistols rockers into a chart-topping jungle-drum take on glam rock with a pirate/Indian twist. This meant a retrenching into the underground, going truly independent, telling the world, "Oh, you think we're too harsh and angry? Fuck you! You're gonna see how harsh and angry we can be!" Meet hardcore, an apt name for the harsh brew punk had become.

While in America, hardcore initially started as a louder/faster/harder/angrier form of creative expression, resulting in some genuinely exciting records dropping from BlackFlagCirclejerksFearBadBrainsAngrySamoansDOAMinorThreatHuskerDuETC, it quickly devolved into something ridiculously fast and stupid. The English reaction seemed to generally go the way of Discharge's poorly-recorded take on Motorhead's speedy brutality, played on cheap equipment: Welcome the Exploited and GBH and every other desperate tosser from England's provinces with a fluorescent-colored mohawk or an exaggeration of Sid's spikes held up with leftover glue from the morning's sniff bag, plus a studded leather jacket. Either that, or the squat scene coughed up a million anarchist bands following Crass' lead and vying to see who could be more amedolic in their attempt to strip down Hawkwind's hippie barbarism to a load of shouted leftist slogans.

As proven by *Burning Britain*, Cherry Red's ambitious 4-CD survey of Britpunk's third wave, this may be too harsh and narrow a view of what's now called UK82. True, there's plenty of Mohican stomp here from the aforementioned Discharge ("Decontrol"), GBH ("No Survivors"), and the Exploited ("Alternative"), plus other bright lights like Vice Squad ("Last Rockers"), Anti Pasti (the corrosive fuzz-riffing "No Government"), and English Dogs ("Psycho Killer," over which David Byrne may wanna tap them on the shoulder). There's also as much anarcho-squat-rock as you can swallow from Poison Girls ("Pretty Polly"), Subhumans ("Reason For Existence") and Omega Tribe ("Freedom Peace & Unity"). Yet as these 114 tracks prove, there was plenty of room for '70s punk vets (the Damned and their pogo-psych rager "Wait For The Blackout," Chelsea's "Evacuate," UK Subs' speed-AC/DC "Endangered Species," the Vibrators' post-Dolls "Dragnet," The Lurkers' "Drag You Out") as well as their spiritual offspring, such as Newtown Neurotics ("Mindless Violence"), Stiffs (the infectious "Volume Control," which could be the Professionals



V.A. — BATTLEGROUND KOREA: SONGS AND SOUNDS OF AMERICA'S FORGOTTEN WAR (Bear Family) 4-CD

The Korean War did not generate nearly as much, or nearly as memorable, American music as World War II and the Vietnam War. The scale of the conflict wasn't nearly as massive as World War II's, and it wasn't nearly as controversial among the US public as Vietnam was. But there were quite a few discs in the early 1950s that took the war as its main or indirect subject, and more than a hundred are on this four-CD box.

No war's worth a single record, good or bad—though the Vietnam War sparked so many that Bear Family did a 13-CD box of those, *Next Stop Is Vietnam*. Vietnam was marked by many protest songs, some classic, and quite a few less durable odes of patriotic endorsement, as you can hear on that anthology (which, as massive as it is, does not include many other tracks that could have been considered).

In contrast, the songs about Korea tended to be rather matter-of-fact, even fatalistic. They were seldom too political in nature, and certainly rarely questioned US intervention, although there were many dead and wounded on all sides of the fighting. More than 30,000 Americans lost their lives—and many more Koreans and Chinese died, including civilians as well as military personnel.

In keeping with Bear Family's usual specialties, *Battleground Korea* emphasizes the rootsier artists who pitched in with a song (or more) about the war, even if none of these efforts were among their career highlights. The roll call includes bluesmen Lightnin' Hopkins, BB King, JB Lenoir, Arthur Crudup, and John Lee Hooker (as one of his many pseudonyms, "Johnny Williams"); country giants Ernest Tubb, the Delmore Brothers, the Louvin Brothers, Gene Autry, Tex Ritter, and Merle Travis; New Orleans R&B pioneers Fats Domino, Lloyd Price, and Dave Bartholomew; bluegrassers Jim & Jesse; and gospel icon Sister Rosetta Tharpe. There are also plenty of efforts in all of these styles by names

remembered by very few—some even known to very few hardcore collectors—and a bit of mainstream pop, though the sides in that genre are among the weakest.

As a history of how American involvement in the war was reflected in popular music and culture, this box is invaluable. As a quality listening experience, it's less impressive. There are a number of fervently patriotic, at times martial, declarations (and pro-Ike Eisenhower tunes) that are difficult to bear more than once or twice, whatever your political viewpoint. So are the records based on "Dear John" letters, which, of course, spun off some "answer" singles based on the same deal.

There were even some attempts at making some humor out of the situation by reading "Dear John"-like missives detailing how wives were screwing things up at home—as Emmitt Slay and Hank Penny did from the black and white viewpoints, respectively, in their very similar



"Male Call" (Slay) and "A Letter from Home" (Penny). They're tough to laugh at or with, especially when Slay's track ends with the illiterate soldier hearing the letter killing himself. (Yes.) That's bad enough, but the knife's twisted with Slay's punch line: "Hot dog, I gave him the wrong letter!" Haw haw.

This being a Bear Family production, however, more cuts are listenable than not. The most historically notable might be Lloyd Price's "Mailman Blues," the jump blues B-side of his groundbreaking 1952 classic "Lawdy Miss Clawdy." (Here's guessing it might have helped inspire the title lyric of Buddy Holly's "Mailman, Bring Me No More Blues," though the songs are otherwise entirely different.) JB Lenoir's "I'm in Korea" is an early indication he'd go into more socially conscious material than any other mid-20th century bluesman, though this is more mundane than his mid-'60s ventures in that direction. It's always a pleasure to hear the Delmore Brothers' close harmonies, and their "Heartbreak Ridge" (with frequent sideman Wayne Raney on bluesy harmonica) doesn't show up on many anthologies.

Some of the more memorable obscurities are some of the strangest

cuts. The lead singer of the Kalvin Brothers' eerie "Somewhere in Korea" sounds like a woman; the 1952 single was their only release, though they were down the bill on Alan Freed's legendary Moondog Maytime Ball concert that year ("no further information on the Kalvin Brothers could be found" state the liners). Kwan Li's gospel-ish, shakily sung (though mostly recited) "The Legend of Harry Holt," from circa 1964 and written from a Korean orphan's perspective, might have been heartfelt, but is burdened with a frighteningly shaky vocal.

On one of the few tracks that gets political, Jackie Doll & His Pickled Peppers' good-time, bouncy 1951 country tune "When They Drop the Atomic Bomb" looks forward to Douglas MacArthur ordering such an attack (which the general pushed for before getting fired by Harry Truman) as if it's of no greater import than home pest removal. Far more joyous are the upbeat songs of relief from war's end on Disc Four, especially Tharpe's "There's Peace in Korea"; Crudup and Hopkins, in fact, both issued 45s titled "The War Is Over" in 1953, though they were wholly different songs.

While the great bulk of this box's selections are from 1950 (when the US entered the war) to 1953 (when fighting ended), a few tracks slip in from later in the 1950s, and even up through the mid-'60s. The pair of song-poems copyrighted 2003 are too chronologically anomalous (and not good enough) to merit a place here. But otherwise the discs are programmed pretty well, sequenced more or less to mirror US attitudes from anxious entry to combat, worries about the impact of absent soldiers on families back home, and the end of the war—though of course tensions in divided Korea, with international repercussions, persist to this day.

As is par for the course with Bear Family boxes, the accompanying hardback book is of at least equal value to the music, and maybe more interesting. Besides detailed notes on each track, authors Hugo Keesing and Bill Geerhart also offer basic overviews on aspects of the war to place the era and its music in context. There are a wealth of illustrations of musicians and the discs, reprints of vintage ads, and photos of actual soldiers in Korea, in battle and elsewhere. It's likely to be the only quality document of a dimension to the war that's historically important, yet overlooked by most histories of military conflict, whether of the Korean War or different wars of different eras. (Richie Unterberger)