

A Global Forum for Naval Historical Scholarship

International Journal of Naval History

August 2004/ December 2004

Volume 3 Numbers 2/3

William Stueck, et.al., **The Korean War in World History**. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 203 pages, \$35.00.

Richard Peters and Xiaobing Li, et.al.'s. **Voices from the Korean War: Personal Stories of American, Korean, and Chinese Soldiers**. (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 312 pages, \$35.00.

A dual review by Dr. Leo Dougherty

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In his book, *Korea: The First War We Lost*, historian Bevin Alexander wrote that the war there “need not have been protracted for so long, nor to have demanded so much in lives and treasure, nor to have left behind such hostility between nations that had much to lose and little to gain by enmity.” Mr. Alexander’s thesis on the Korean War, in fact, echoed General Omar N. Bradley’s often-misquoted comment that Korea was “The Wrong War, at the Wrong place, with the Wrong People.” William Stueck’s *The Korean War in World History*, and Richard Peters and Xiaobing Li’s *Voices from the Korean War*, take a much different position on this conflict. Contrary to Bevin’s thesis, the essayists in both books assert that the war was the inevitable outcome of both internal political conditions on the Korean Peninsula, and the cold war rivalry between the United States, USSR, and PRC. The essayists are in agreement that given the political dynamics on the Korean peninsula, and state of relations between the United States, the USSR, and later the Peoples Republic of China, the Korean War was, in fact, unavoidable. Like

Vietnam a decade later, the Korean War was a direct outgrowth of the post-World War II colonial settlements that left a political vacuum later filled by domestic political parties supported by either of the two major superpowers. It is with this point in mind, that Stueck, Peters and Li masterfully present their edited works.

William Stueck's *The Korean War in World History*, is a thoughtful collection of essays written by eminent scholars on the international nature of the Korean War (I tend not to use the word 'conflict' as the Korean War was, indeed, a war). Dr. Allan R. Millett, the eminent military historian and scholar on the Korean War, provides an excellent essay on the Korean people and the impact the war had on both North and South Korea. Professor Millett argued that the Korean War had its origins in the civil war between the two Koreas. Professor Millett wrote that at the end of World War II, two completely different societies occupied the same peninsula, this despite the fact that they shared the same pre-war history. Korea, situated at the 'corner' of three competing empires: Russia (later the USSR), China (pre-1949 and later post-1949 PRC), and Japan (1905-1945), inevitably became caught up in the territorial and political aspirations of each power. What complicated Korea's internal political dynamics was the post-World War II territorial dispute, as well as the ideological struggle between the Marxist currents flowing from Pyongyang in the guise of Kim Il-sung, and the western-oriented, heavily messianic influence of Syngman Rhee on his supporters. As Millett wrote, both Kim Il-sung and Syngman Rhee best represented the prevailing winds on the Korean peninsula after Japan's defeat at the end of World War II. In fact, as Korea's post-World War II history illustrated, both Kim Il-Sung and Syngman Rhee were able to manipulate the political systems in their respective constituencies based on their World War II activities amidst the confusion and tensions over Korea's future structure of government between the two superpowers. Thus, Kim Il-Sung's services to both the Communist Chinese and later Soviets, made him the logical choice for Moscow and Beijing to head a post-World War II Korea. As it turned out, Kim was, in fact, more ruthless in dealing with both the pro-Beijing and pro-Moscow factions in his own party than he was with his counterpart in the south. For his part, Syngman Rhee's Christianity and western education, as well as his fervent anti-Japanese credentials made him the ideal candidate, at least in the eyes of the United States, to lead a postwar, united Korean state. As early as 1946, both Stalin

and Truman failed to realize at the time that Korea's future, and indeed that of postwar Asia, would be determined by the outcome of this internal war between the two Korean leaders. In fact, the Korean War had far greater post-World War II implications as it set in motion the U.S. military build up in Asia, and the United States' intervention in Vietnam's civil war in the late 1950's. Indeed, as Millett wrote, "the Japanese surrender of 14 August 1945 ended one big war and started many smaller wars throughout the wreckage of the Japanese Empire." Finally, Professor Millett dispelled the myth that the war was merely between the United States and the two communist giants. Instead, the author pointed to the domestic causes and consequences of a war that devastated the Korean peninsula, and led to the cold war in Asia between the United States, the Soviet Union, and People's Republic of China (PRC).

The essays of Ms. Kathryn Weathersby and Chen Jian respectively point to the impact and influence of the Korean War on both the Soviet Union and PRC. Miss Weathersby, author of several major studies on Soviet involvement in the Korean War, portrayed the Soviets as more willing to confront the West (i.e. the United States) over Korea, thereby diverting the latter's attention away from Europe and the larger issue of German rearmament. Failing this, Stalin thereby prodded an unwilling Mao Zedong to come to the assistance "of their fraternal brothers in Pyongyang," despite the PRC's reluctance to confront the United States, still smarting over the "loss of China," and push it into the hands of Chiang Kai-shek on Taiwan. It is at this point that a minor shortcoming in Chen's otherwise excellent essay appears, in that he fails to discuss the presence of Chiang's Nationalist Army on Taiwan, and how this led to China's decision to intervene directly in the war after October 1950. Chen likewise failed to mention how unsettling the issue of Taiwan was to Mao. Even the threat by General MacArthur to use Nationalist troops after December 1950 must have been unsettling to the Communist Chinese leader, as these troops, represented a significant threat to his tenuous hold over the PRC. More important, however, is Miss Weathersby's point that Stalin was ready and willing to sacrifice Mao Zedong's PRC in his bid to dominate the larger prize of Eastern and possibly all or portions of Western Europe. Indeed, for as long as he had a willing ally in Mao to carry on his war against the United States in Korea, Stalin could concentrate on the larger prize of Europe.

Both Lloyd C. Gardner's and Michael Schaller's essays pointed to the war's effects on U.S. foreign policy and the rise of Japan as a strategic partner of the United States in Asia. Professors Gardner and Schaller make the point that the real casualties of the Korean War was U.S. foreign policy in Asia *vis a vis* the pronounced policies of containment and Japanese disarmament. Indeed, both Gardner and Schaller agreed that the real victors in the Korean War were Japan, West Germany, and later Chiang Kai-shek's regime on Taiwan.

Even prior to the Korean War, Japan began to figure greatly into Washington's calculus for defense against further Soviet encroachment. The outbreak of the Korean War not only accelerated this strategy but increased pressure to "re-militarize" both Japan and more importantly, Germany, as bulwarks against the Soviet Union and the PRC. As Gardner pointed out in his essay, "*Korean Borderlands: Imaginary Frontiers of the Cold War*," the outbreak of war in Korea rippled through the halls of Congress, into the American polity, and onto the world stage, insofar as U.S. foreign relations were concerned. Already stung by the "loss of china," and the accusations fed by the Republican Party against his administration, both President Truman and Secretary of State Dean Acheson could not appear weak nor allow a North Korean invasion to succeed, even if it meant direct intervention. In a reference aimed directly at the Truman Administration's China policy, Senator Tom Connally of Texas stated, "we could not let this one [i.e., Korea] get away," from the United States as we did China in 1949.

Ralph Peters and Xiaobing Li's *Voices from the Korean War: Personal Stories of American, Korean, and Chinese Soldiers*, offers various perspectives of the war, both from the fine historical narrative on the ebb and flow of the war by both editors as well as from the participants themselves. In this reviewer's opinion, the opening narrative on the war itself is the strongest and, one might add, best written narratives on the Korean War. Both Peters and Xiaobing Li provide a well-rounded, multi-cultural perspective of the Korean War and its outcome. For his part, Dr. Li, in his introductory essay, provided the reader with an insight on how he was able to gather the accounts by the Chinese and North Korean participants.

More important, however, is the chronological order on how the various essays are organized in the book. A significant number of accounts deal with the PRC's intervention

in the war, and the furious fights that took place from October 1950 to the signing of the armistice in July 1953. One added feature not found in any books on the Korean War is the account provided by a North Korean army captain. Due to the repressive nature of North Korean society, this account is important, as little has emerged on the North Korean Army's perspective and participation in the war.

Also included in Peters' and Li's book are accounts from U.S. Marines, soldiers, Republic of Korea Marines and soldiers, and South Korean civilians. Each individual provided his or her unique perspective of the war from 1950 to 1953. Indeed, apart from the essayist's graphic accounts of fighting that raged in Korea from the Chosin Reservoir to such places as "Outpost Harry" (one of the first accounts to emerge from the war), there are tales of the 'lighter sides' of the war. These included the oftentimes rough journey to Korea from the United States via naval transport; the arrival of actress Betty Hutton at a forward outpost along the front lines; and perhaps the most humorous one of a soldier running for election as sheriff back home in Oklahoma from Korea!

Most important, however, are the accounts of bravery and endurance by U.S., South Korean and Chinese forces as they fought their way out of entrapment and endured Korea's bitter cold winters. The accounts presented here, in fact, make for a very good book. One serious shortcoming of this otherwise excellent book, however, is the absence of any accounts on allied participation in the Korean War. Indeed, accounts by participants from Britain, Canada, Greece, Turkey, Australia, and New Zealand would've enhanced the monograph's value even more by pointing to the multi-national aspects of the Korean War. The inclusion of these accounts would've illustrated the fact that the war was not just a struggle between the superpowers but was, instead, an early test of the concept of collective security. Finally, the addition of these essays would've highlighted William Stueck's point that the Korean War was far from an isolated "police action" and was instead, a world war or, as some historians have written, the United Nation's first test against aggression.

One last omission is the lack of any accounts by U.S. Navy naval officers (aviators) and enlisted men, as well as U.S. Air Force personnel (pilots and enlisted men). The fighting in Korea was a war that was fought not only on land but also in the skies and along Korea's coastlines. Accounts provided by the officers and men stationed aboard

the U.S. Navy's aircraft carriers positioned in the Sea of Japan, oftentimes ignored or forgotten, would have given a better perspective as to the participation of these critical forces in this war. Given the operational and tactical importance of naval and air forces during the Korean War, this is a serious omission.

The most significant shortcoming of this other excellent book is the lack of any Soviet accounts. Understanding both the diplomatic and military roles played by the USSR is critical in understanding the dynamics of the Korean War. The support provided by Soviet troops (such as pilots and advisors to the North Korean and Chinese armies) was, in fact, critical to the early successes and later failures of the North Korean Army, particularly in the period prior to and during the initial six months of the war. The inclusion of Soviet participants in this book would have, in fact, complimented Ms. Weathersby's excellent essay "The Soviet Role in the Korean War."

Stueck's failure to include photographs or maps to guide the reader through the complexities of the fighting in Korea lends itself to the editorial style of the book. This omission is nonetheless a minor shortcoming as it leaves the reader with no point of reference to consult. On the other hand, Ralph Peters and Xiaobing Li's *Voices from the Korean War* contains both maps and photographs that provide the reader with an overview of the ebb and flow of the war from its commencement in June 1950 through the armistice in July 1953.

Despite these shortcomings, both books are extremely well written and organized, and are well worth their cover prices. The information found in both books compliment each other as one deals with the larger geo-strategic issues that led to the fighting, while the other one deals with the operational and tactical issues raised by three years of war in Korea. Both William Stueck's *The Korean War in World History* and Ralph Peters and Xiaobing Li's *Voices from the Korean War* provide historians and students alike with a better understanding of the so-called 'Forgotten War', and its impact on U.S. foreign and military policy during the 1950s and 1960s in Asia.



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