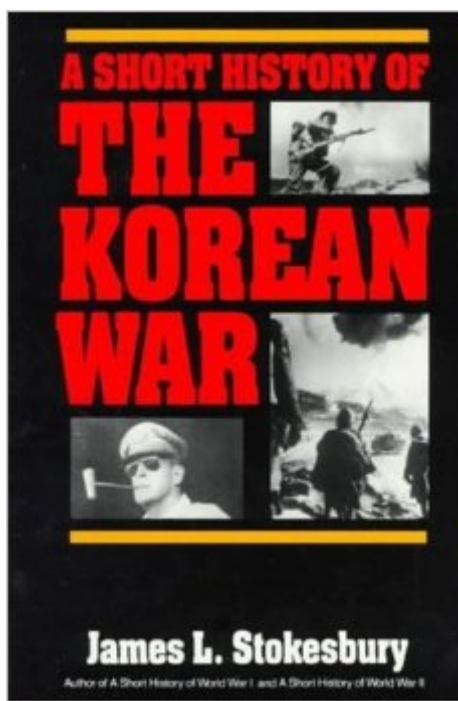


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A Short History Of The Korean War



Synopsis

As pungent and concise as his short histories of both world wars, Stokesbury's survey of "the half war" takes a broad view and seems to leave nothing out but the details. The first third covers the North Korean invasion of June 1950, the Pusan perimeter crisis, MacArthur's master stroke at Inchon and the intervention by Chinese forces that November. At this point, other popular histories of the war reach the three-quarter mark, ending often with a cursory summary of the comparatively undramatic three-and-a-half years required to bring the war to its ambiguous conclusion on July 27, 1953. Stokesbury renders the latter period as interesting as the operational fireworks of the first six months: the Truman-MacArthur controversy; the political limitations on U.S. air power; the need for the Americans to fight the war as cheaply as possible, due to NATO commitments; the prolonged negotiations at Panmunjom over the prisoner-exchange issue; and the effect of the war on the home front. Whether the United States could have/should have stayed out of the war in the first place comes under discussion: "no" on both counts, according to the author.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"The wrong war, at the wrong place, at the wrong time, and with the wrong enemy." - General of the Army Omar Bradley This book is a testament to the fact that historical works need not be a long, dry succession of innumerable statistics and facts. This book reads like a well-written novel, having all the literary elements which captivate a reader: character development, climax of events, and finally resolution. Though one may argue, as the demilitarized zone separating North and South Korea was established, if there was any resolution at all in the case of the Korean War. "[T]he cease-fire brought not jubilation, triumph, and ease after toil, but rather a mingled sense of relief and

frustration, and unhappy awareness that if things were not going to get worse, neither were they going to get much better," Stokesbury writes. A "short history" of a war in which casualties on both sides totaled at least three million does not mean that Stokesbury wrote only of the major events of the Korean War. Significant attention is paid to the period between the end of the Second World War and 1950. The stage is set for the beginning of the Korean War by Stokesbury's description of the "state of the world" at the time: "The basic antagonism of [democracy and capitalism in the West and the totalitarian Communists in the Soviet Union] had been submerged by the common danger of Nazi Germany, and the temporary necessity of alliance to defeat Hitler and his followers in World War II. But once the menace was removed, the old differences surfaced again, and within a tragically short time after 1945, it was obvious that the world had entered on the old and dangerous paths once more." Under these conditions, Stokesbury argues, the war in Korea was unavoidable.

In the United States, the Korean War is sometimes called "The Forgotten War" because the latter two-thirds of it was spent in stalemate and it occurred between World War II and the Vietnam War, both of which left a huge cultural impact. However, the Korean War was an important military event in the early Cold War and certainly changed the face of the Korean peninsula. In the post-World War II period, Korea, previously under Japanese rule, was split across the 38th parallel with the Soviet Union occupying the northern half and the United States occupying the south. It was supposed to be temporary, but in the new Cold War world, this would not be. The Soviets turned the north into a communist state while the United States supported the rightist president Syngman Rhee in the south. In June 1950, North Korea invaded and attempted to wipe out South Korea. Because of U.S. policy of leaving South Korea without an unnecessarily powerful military, they were crushed by North Korean forces. The United States and the United Nations reacted. The U.N. Security Council passed resolutions condemning the invasion and called on U.N. member states to join and repel the invasion. South Korean and United States forces would dominate the repel effort. With the South Koreans stuck in the southeast corner of the peninsula, General Douglas MacArthur thought up of a risky scheme to take over Korea. He concocted the landing at Inchon and allied forces would meet up in the middle. It succeeded fabulously. Then came the decision of where to go from there. North Korea was back across the 38th parallel, but the United States decided not to pass up the opportunity to simply wipe the communist state off the map, or at least leave it severely smaller. So, U.N.

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