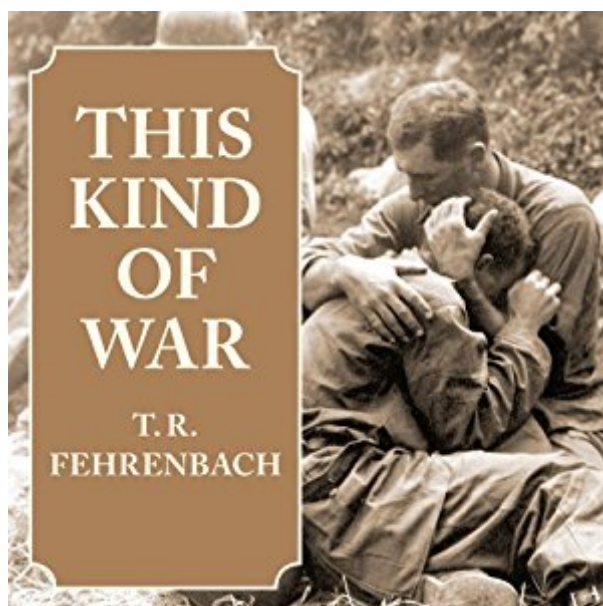


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This Kind Of War: The Classic Korean War History



Synopsis

This Kind of War is a monumental study of the conflict that began in June 1950. Successive generations of U.S. military officers have considered this book an indispensable part of their education. T. R. Fehrenbach's narrative brings to life the harrowing and bloody battles that were fought up and down the Korean Peninsula. Partly drawn from official records, operations journals, and histories, it is based largely on the compelling personal narratives of the small-unit commanders and their troops. Unlike any other work on the Korean War, it provides a clear, panoramic view; sharp insight into the successes and failures of U.S. forces; and a riveting account of fierce clashes between U.N. troops and the North Korean and Chinese communist invaders. The lessons that Colonel Fehrenbach identifies still resonate. Severe peacetime budget cuts after World War II left the U.S. military a shadow of its former self. The terrible lesson of Korea was that to send into action troops trained for nothing but "serving a hitch" in some quiet billet was an almost criminal act. Throwing these ill-trained and poorly equipped troops into the heat of battle resulted in the war's early routs. The United States was simply unprepared for war. As we enter a new century with Americans and North Koreans continuing to face each other across the 38th parallel, we would do well to remember the price we paid during the Korean War.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Unpreparedness is a major theme in American military history. In his popular and unsympathetic view of America's involvement in Korea, T.R. Fehrenbach argues that the American armed forces were psychologically unprepared for the type of limited war that took place in Korea ("this kind of war"). The author questions whether the citizen-soldier and the society from which it breeds were

willing to fight and die for an intangible foreign policy in Asia. Originally published two years before a full American commitment in Vietnam (1963), the author warns that this type of conflict will become the rule rather than the exception and America had better train a professional force both physically and mentally to deal with such future conflicts. Fehrenbach's reporting contains many lessons learned and leadership analysis which appeals more to current active duty military personnel. Fehrenbach's book is considered a classic, and is listed on many of the professional military reading lists. Fehrenbach's strengths lie in his combat narrative, particularly at the small unit level, however, when the author attempts to place the conflict in its overall political perspective, he falls short. Many paragraphs contain merely two or three sentences, that for this reviewer, made this book a chore to read in places. In this regard, Fehrenbach trails behind other authors on the subject such as Roy Appleman, and a recently published series edited by Allan R. Millett. Having himself commanded units at platoon, company, and battalion level in Korea, Fehrenbach is direct and pulls no punches.

T.R. Fehrenbach's "This Kind of War" is the classic military history of the Korean War. Fehrenbach addresses the strategic and operational aspects of the conflict, but much of his focus is on the tactical experience of U.S. units. His book is a searing indictment of the U.S. military and of the United States for having failed to maintain combat-ready forces less than five years removed from the end of the Second World War. The U.S. Army and Marine Corps elements thrust into sudden conflict in June 1950 following the communist invasion of the Republic of Korea had to relearn, the hard way, all the old and hard lessons of warfare. Young soldiers who had been coddled by peacetime occupation duty in Japan found the battlefield to be a merciless place of death for those who were unprepared. In Fehrenbach's words "They were learning, in the hardest school there was, that it is a soldier's lot to suffer and that his destiny may be to die." Fehrenbach's prose is blunt and straightforward; the narrative sketches the ancient truths of combat and their modern realities and pulls no punches with respect to the shortcomings of both the military and the political leadership. Aging General Douglas MacArthur ran great risks during the Battle of the Pusan Perimeter in August 1950 to husband forces for the spectacular September counterstroke at Inchon that turned the tide of combat, only to underestimate the risk of Chinese intervention and suffer an humiliating defeat inside North Korea in November. In parallel manner, the Truman Administration made the hard political decision to intervene in June 1950, then failed to think through the likely implications of going north to the Chinese border in October 1950. Fehrenbach dispenses credit where due. The U.S.

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