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**Remembering the Forgotten War: Anglo-American Scholarship on the Korean Conflict**

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The July, 1995 dedication of a new Korean War monument in Washington, D.C.―thirteen years after the unveiling of the Vietnam War memorial―drama-tizes the belated recognition of America’s first and most important conflict of the Cold War period. Caught between the global significance of World War II and the domestic trauma sparked by the Vietnam War, the Korean conflict never captured the enduring fascination of the reading public. This relative neglect has little to do with the war’s importance in America’s foreign policy since 1945 or with the suffering and sacrifice of the Korean people. Instead it can be found in the peculiar development of “schools” of Korean War authors who write for the Anglophone world, principally the nations of North America and Great Britain. As the fiftieth anniversary of North Korea’s invasion approaches, more books are sure to appear, so it should be useful to know why American and British authors seem to be writing about several wars, not one.

The problems of Korean War historiography are not unique to this one conflict, but to writing about all wars in the United States and Great Britain. To borrow C.P. Snow’s concept of “two cultures,” the writers of history seek readers from two “culturar” audiences, the academic-government readers who constitute the nation’s policy-attentive elite and the vast lay audience who read history for entertainment, escape, and exculpation. At issue within the first audience are questions of how “the lessons of history” should influence contemporary policy and how current policy problems have historic roots that must be nurtured or severed as the foreign policy establishment moves forward in its quixotic quest for “solutions” and “new world order.” Academic- government history (defined not just by the audience, but by the historian’s [page 54] employers and sponsors) has little influence on the books the lay population reads, which often approach comics without pictures or video games gone wrong. Some historians of considerable intellect and taste for research can and do reach a mass audience; the late Barbara Tuchman and William Manchester come to mind. Nevertheless, academic-government history is not defined by scholarship or sponsorship alone, but internal divisions within the historical profession itself on politics and the nature of historical study.

In more specific terms, American academic historians have too often dis-connected the causes and prevention of conflict (diplomatic history) from the conduct of war (military history). Often the assessment of the consequences of war are disconnected again from a war’s causes and conduct. Historians of the older tradition of organic, integrated political history—historians like Edward Gibbon and Francis Parkman―would read with wonderment some of the books that pass today as wisdom on world affairs, whether the authors were political scientists or historians. Contemporary university historians tend to be overspecialized, under-educated, and overzealous about contemporary political agendas that have little to do with the search for truth about the past, let alone the quest for national or individual virtue. The results are works that become the scholar’s equivalent of a warrior’s conquest; the favorable review is just another feather in one’s war bonnet, placed there at the expense of some fallen warrior from another ideological tribe. Government historians have a different ordeal, which is the moral equivalent (to push the American Indian analogy) of a purification or puberty rite because their books must survive the review of the tribal elders, often not historians but military officers and career bureaucrats. Neither condition encourages fresh thinking.1

The study of any war presents a daunting challenge for the historian. Following the traditional chronological organization, one should deal with a war’s “three Cs” of causation, conduct, and consequences. This approach is as old as the books of Thucydides and Josephus and just as valid now as it was in the pre-Christian era. Influenced by the use of historical study to identify and understand the changes and continuities in modern warfare, some contemporary historians have experimented with a vertical schema of analysis that examines the politics of war (war aims, domestic politics, the stresses of mobilization), the strategy of war (the concepts for the use of military forces for political goals), the operational conduct of warfare (the organization and employment of military forces against an enemy’s leadership, population, and armed forces over extended periods of time and geographic space), and the tactical conduct of warfare (the use of fire and maneuver in battle to destroy the enemy’s will and capability to fight). Using the horizontal and vertical [page 55] schemas for the study of war and giving equal attention to all the belligerents requires a lifetime of study and the mastery of many scholarly skills, not the least the ability to work with documents in many languages. It is not surprising that “complete” studies of a single war (let alone the phenomenon of warfare itself) are hard to find, but they do exist.2

Choosing the most successful forays into the history of warfare is about as dangerous for academic authors as the real thing, but some books deserve historiographical “star” status: Donald Kagan’s four volume A History of the Peloponnesian War (1969-1987), C.V. Wedgwood, The Thirty Years War (1938), Sir Michael Howard, The Franco-Prussian War (1961), and Gerhard Weinberg, A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II (1994). In wars in which the United States played a central role, the best books are James M. McPherson, Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era (1988) and David F. Trask, The War with Spain in 1898 (1981), but even McPherson’s book does not meet the standards of Confederate-sympathizers (who prefer Shelby Footers trilogy), and Trask deals with a war that may have not been “splendid,” but at least was “little.” Two books vie for the title of definitive history of the American Revolution: Don Higginbotham, The War of American Independence (1971) and Robert Middlekauf, The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution, 1763-1789(1982). There is no single authoritative book on World War I or the Vietnam War, whether one defines that as a war that began in 1930, 1945, or 1958. There is no “complete history” of the Korean War either.

THE LIMITS OF DIPLOMATIC HISTORY

At the moment the intellectual high ground among American diplomatic historians is held by Dr. Melvyn P. Leffler, Edward R. Stettinus Professor of American History and chair of the department of history at the University of Virginia and the author of A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War (1992). Leffler is a past president (1994-1995) of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Policy (SHAFR), and his book has received high praise as well as multiple nominations for the most prestigious awards for non-fiction. Preponderance will no doubt shape the textbook accounts of the origins of the Cold War and the Korean War for the next thirty years, and it will not be easily supplanted since Leffler has written the book from sources wide and deep, redolent with archival dust. Yet Preponderance provides a stunning example of why diplomatic historians, even ones as accomplished as Leffler, seem incapable of [page 56] writing about war, especially those fought by the United States.

In his brilliant address upon becoming president of SHAFR, “New Approaches, Old Interpretations, and Prospective Reconfiguration,” Leffler examines the uninspiring contemporary record of academic historians to write integrated history that anyone but other professors will read Leaving aside the pitfalls of academic prose and the impatience of Americans with the written word in general, Leffler’s argument has merit: diplomatic historians by definition deal with important historical and contemporary problems of American foreign policy and politics, but provide too little scholarship that connects foreign policy with changes in the international state system. Leffler is also wise in his evaluation of the contributions of Cold War “revisionist” scholars. Most of them are disciplines of William Appleman Williams and Walter LeFeber, who argue that American ignorance, greed, megalomania, and adventurism caused the great confrontation with the Soviet Union, Certainly, no contemporary historian would dare ignore domestic political influence, especially exercised by special interest groups, upon the foreign policy process. Leffler quite correctly suggests, however, that the revisionists and their corporatist fellow-travelers, who emphasize the deterministic influence of competing economic organizations, have forgotten that there is a big, intractable world out there.3

Yet nowhere in Leffler’s review of forty years of scholarship on American foreign policy does he ever include the use of force within the province of academic historians. Perhaps the view that war represents the failure of diplomacy means that writing about war is a sign of intellectual defeat. At the very least, war is the predictable expression of imperialism, militarism, racism, the struggle for national liberation, and the inevitable result of the clash of economic classes. One might now add another correct cause of war: the intractable conflict between people of different gender and sexual preference, except that it is difficult to identify any fought over the sanctity of genitalia. In fact, diplomatic historians remain so tied to the idea of American exceptionalism, especially the ideals of Wilsonian internationalism, that they tend to view foreign policy as simply an extension of domestic political history. Leffler and the best academics avoid this trip, of course, but even they attack other historians like John Lewis Gaddis, who insists that external threats and geopolitical concerns remain at the heart of American foreign policies.

Leffler’s own treatment of the Korean War in Preponderance shows the limitations of the best diplomatic history in dealing with a war. In addition to his use of appropriate private papers and official documents, Leffler cites the best American scholarship on Korea’s perilous place in Cold War diplomacy. The scholarship fuses international and domestic politics and keeps a critical [page 57] distance from official explanations and bureaucratic documents that reek of committee compromises. Leffler’s sources cover the best scholarship of a gen-eration: the articles and essays of Barton J. Bernstein; William W. Stueck, Jr., The Road to Confrontation: American Policy Toward China and Korea, 1947- 1950(1981); James I. Matray, The Reluctant Crusade: American Foreign Policy in Korea, 1941-1950 (1985); Peter Lowe, The Origins of the Korean War (1986); Charles M. Dobbs, The Unwanted Symbol; American Foreign Policy, the Cold War, and Korea, 1945-1950 (1981); and Lisle Rose, Roots of Tragedy: the United States and the Struggle of Asia, 1945-1953 (1976). International politics after June 25, 1950 are interpreted in Rosemary Foot, The Wrong War: American Policy and the Dimensions of the Korean Conflict (1985) and A Substitute for Victory: The Politics of Peacemaking at the Korean Armistice Talks (1990), The anticipated apogee of the internationalist books will be Stueck, The Necessary War: Korea, An International History (forthcoming, 1995 or 1996), which will supercede Burton I. Kaufman, The Korean War (1986) as the definitive account of the war within a global security framework.4

Leffler is much too astute to ignore the course of history within Korea as an influence on American decision-making, but he follows the conventional view of the war as an invasion by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (Pyongyang) against the Republic of Korea (Seoul), the unfortunate two Korean governments produced by the irreconcilable interests of the United States and the Soviet Union. For South Korea, this invasion ended the Tale of the Two Johns (Hodge and Muccio), the epic blunders and modest achievements of the U.S. Military Government in Korea and the U.S. Embassy and the Korean Military Advisory Group, and the bitter struggles of Syngman Rhee, Kim Ku, Yo Un-hyong, and Pak Hon-yong, none of whom is a household word for American academics except Rhee, the English-speaking master manipulator of Washington opinion. Like his academic contemporaries, Leffler goes to Bruce Cumings, The Origins of the Korean War, 2 vols. (1981 and 1990) for instruction on “the inside story” and, to a lesser degree, to John Merrill, Korea: The Peninsular Origins of the War (1989), Cumings and Merrill, however, drew their inspiration not only from their own residence in Korea, but from a common mentor, the late Gregory Henderson, a foreign service officer in Korea (1948-1950 and 1958-1963) and the author of the seminal Korea: The Politics of the Vortex (1968). Henderson, not the iconoclastic journalist I.F. Stone, deserves the title of “father” of the American revisionists, for his insight into Korean politics (assisted by his fluency in Korean) set the bar high for Cumings and Merrill, Although few historians saw the same [page 58] responsibility for provoking a North Korean attack that Stone found in Seoul and Washington, the Henderson School sought to destroy the conventional wisdom that a Mao Zedong-Stalin-Kim Il-Sung evil triad started the war against a peace loving Republic of Korea.5

Even before the appearance of Cumings’ first volume, the Henderson School entered the dispute with an edited volume: Frank Baldwin, ed., Without Parallel: The American-Korean Relationship Since 1945 (1973). This volume produced the early work not only of Cumings, but Jon Halliday and Robert Simmons. The first scholar, an avowedly Leftist Briton, dealt with the war from the Russian perspective and the latter, a former Peace Corps worker like Cumings, specialized in Chinese history. Many of the same authors then contributed essays to Bruce Cumings, ed., Child of conflict: The Korean- American Relationship, 1943-1953 (1983), which included influential essays by Cumings himself, Merrill, Bernstein, Matray, and Stueck. Simmons went on to write The Strained Alliance: Peking, Pyongyang, Moscow and the Politics of the Korean Civil War (1975), refined and expanded only recently in Sergei N. Goncharov, John W. Lewis, and Xue Litai, Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao and the Korean War (1993). The Henderson School also profited from exhaustive studies of Marxist revolution in 20th century Korea: Robert Scalapino and Chong Sik Lee, Communist in Korea 2 vols., (1972) and Dae-sook Suh, The Korean Communist Movement, 1918-1945 (1967) and Korean Communism, 1945-1980 (1981). The Henderson School ultimately produced two histories of the war that integrated much of its research on Korean politics with its criticism of American intervention: Callum MacDonald, Korea: the War Before Vietnam (1986) the work of a British academic, and Cumings and Halliday, Korea: The Unknown War(1988).

MacDonald’s subtitle reveals the problem of much academic writing on Korea. Like the TV black comedy “Mash,” the Korean War is a way to condemn by allegory the American participation in the Vietnam War. It can also be interpreted as the Department of State’s revenge against the rest of the United States government for blaming it for the success of the Chinese revolution. The Henderson School adds an extra element of ex post facto judgment, for it also holds the United States responsible for the dictatorship of Park Chung-hui, 1961-1979, and the excesses of his successor Chun Doo-hwan, the architect of the Kwangju Massacre of May 1980 and the political repression of the Fifth Republic. Even if their understanding of Korean politics makes their interpretation of events far richer than contemporary diplomatic historians, the Henderson School can be as counterfactual and selective in its analysis as the most dogmatic revisionists. [page 59]

The weakness of diplomatic-political historians writings about war in general and the Korean War in particular is their obsession for fixing responsibility for the initiation of the conflict. Historical analysis becomes more like a legal indictment than an explanation of causation. There is little attention to the conduct of the war, although the consequences are normally listed like a jail sentence. Using the vertical model for war assessment, diplomatic historians seldom venture from the level of political analysis. While they may deal with force as a political phenomenon, they are uncomfortable in dealing with armed forces as human institutions or in writing about high commanders and the conduct of war. It is no accident that the elite of contemporary American diplomatic historians is dominated by academics who have no personal military experience or even government service outside of the Peace Corps. Like many other intellectuals, academic historians often declare that things they do not understand (like strategy, operations, and tactics) must be irrelevant or worse. The easiest way to deal with war is simply to condemn it.

THE OFFICIAL HISTORIES OF THE KOREAN WAR

One characteristic of a modern military establishment, officered by long- service professionals, is its interest in the history of warfare, especially its own participation. When military history began to emerge as a historical specialty in the nineteenth century, it did so because of multiple requirements defined by the higher headquarters of national armed forces. These demands for an ordered past served various needs: (1) to build unit esprit by preserving regimental traditions and wartime exploits — even in defeat — in printed form, (2) to provide reading/educational materials for student-officers in command and staff colleges, (3) to provide background studies on military issues for senior officials, military and civilian, (4) to describe a rationale for a service’s functions, especially in the face of technologically-based new services like aviation, and (5) to create books on the conduct of war for the attentive public, whose participation in military policy would likely increase with the rise of representative government. First produced in a systematic way after the Napoleonic Wars by the Prussian army, military history had a distinctly military character since it focused on case studies of battles and campaigns from the perspective of senior officers, who, in fact, did much of the writing themselves.6

Until World War II military history in the United States remained the intellectual property of the American armed forces, which fulfilled its public education role by publishing multi-volume document sets. Real books on mili- [page 60] tary affairs came from individual authors like Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan, USN, or Colonel John McAuley Palmer, USA, or hawkish politicians like Henry Cabot Lodge and Theodore Roosevelt. The rise of public, “official,” history throughout the. federal government, however, reshaped the historical practices of the armed forces during World War II. Although historical analysis in the professional military educational system remained the province of officer-instructors, civilian-academic historians (some temporarily in uniform) brought new conceptions and standards to the historical divisions, which have never been the same since World War II. The influx of civilian professionals, many with limited or no military experience, into the armed forces historical divisions has continued since 1945; despite some cutbacks, the number of civilian historians working somewhere in the armed forces probably numbers seven hundred. Their professional and intellectual values are formed by their university graduate education (a minimum MA required) and their identification with other civilian public historians.

Their detractors have always called public historians “court historians,” modern versions of royal chronologists, genealogists, tract-authors, and minstrels. Some public historians have felt more like jesters or sorcerers. Public historians in the armed forces 一 according to their own testimony 一 seldom encounter extra-professional pressures to adjust, trim, bloat, or fabricate their works to protect national, service, or individual reputations. Controversial matters are usually handled by silence or understatement. Although official historians have not escaped occasional censure for their bland treatment of spicy events, their record for clarity and objectivity is quite good as judged by their fellow professionals, who participate in panel reviews of “official” manuscripts and write reviews of government-sponsored books.

The principal problem of public history and America’s wars is not honesty, but focus. The senior officers of the armed forces set the agenda: the strategic context, operational experience, and tactical performance are the things worth studying. Service historians are supposed to write about their service; the history or joint and allied cooperation or lack thereof is somebody else’s problem. The causes and consequences of war are not a pressing matter, and political direction is largely off-limits. Logistics gets scrutiny, but intelligence does not, usually because agencies outside the military discourage it. Leadership failures are treated gently unless the embarrassment, like Douglas MacArthur’s in 1941-42 and 1950, is too public to ignore. One the other hand, systemic problems of leadership, such as those in the U.S. Eighth Army in 1950-1951, do not attract much attention. Battlefield heroics make better reading than combat ineptness, whatever the reasons. For all their potential short- [page 61] comings, however, the historical divisions of the U.S. armed forces have not done badly on the Korean War, and they have more courage than their State Department counterpart, which still publishes only document collections (the Foreign Relations of the United States series) and slowly at that.7

The first limitation to the official histories of the U.S. armed forces and the Department of Defense on the Korean War is that they pay little attention to the pre-June, 1950 period. If it were not for unpublished histories by Headquarters, U.S. Army Forces in Korea, XXIV Corps, and U.S. Army Military Government in Korea, the pre-invasion insurgency and pacification campaign, 1948-1950, would pass unnoticed. The otherwise excellent Steven L. Rearden, History of the Office of the Secretary of Defense: The Formative Years, 1947- 1950 (1984) devotes one chapter of nineteen on “the spreading turmoil in Asia” and gives Korea equal billing with Japan, the Philippines, China, and Indochina, which is not much. The only study of the U.S. Army effort on the ground is Robert K. Sawyer, Military Advisors in Korea: KMAG in Peace and War (1962 and 1988) and it is incomplete in coverage, shallow in analysis, and too fulsome on the Army’s level of effort and purity of intention in creating the South Korean armed forces. There is scant mention of the bitter fighting on Cheju-do and in the four Cholla and Kyongsang provinces. (There are no official histories at all of the advisory groups in Greece and the Philippines either.) The raw material for a history of the pre-1950 war at every level exists, but no Chief of Military History thought such a study worthwhile, perhaps because such a history would discomfort the generals of the South Korean army.

From the June invasion until the July 1953 Armistice, the Korean War became a legitimate war for official historians. Of course, no public historian has written about the war from the perspective of the White House or the Department of State, but qualified academic historians have worked over Harry Truman and Dean Acheson and quickly debunked their self-serving memoirs. The view from the Pentagon is captured in several detailed, documented works: Doris Condit, History of the Office of the Secretary of Defense: The Test of War (1988); James F. Schnabel and Robert J. Watson, The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, III: The Korean War (1979); and James F. Schnabel, United States Army in the Korean War: Policy and Direction: The First Year (1972).

The separate military services, building on their World War II historical programs, turned to with a will on the Korean War. The U.S. Army Center of Military History produced three “in-theater” operational volumes in its United States Army in the Korean War series: Roy E. Appleman, South to the Nak- [page 62] tong. North to the Yalu (1961), which covers June-November, 1950; Billy Mossman, Ebb and Flow (1990), which carries the war to July, 1953; and Walter Hermes, Jr., Truce Tent and Fighting Front (1966), which covers October, 1951 to July, 1953. The chronological void (July-October, 1951) is telling, however, for during this period the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps senior officers in Korea urged a second major amphibious operation to exploit the summer collapse of the Chinese People’s Volunteer Force and to reestablish United Nations Command along the Pyongyang-Wonsan line. General Matthew B. Ridgway, MacArthur’s successor as CINCUNC, scotched the idea and accepted a plan from Far East Air Forces (General O.P. Weyland) to bomb the Chinese and North Koreans into submission or cooperative negotiation. No history yet covers this important strategic debate and Ridgway’s decision. Ridgway gives Operation Talons scant attention in his own memoir, The Korean War (1967) and even less analysis of Weyland’s air option, Operation Strangle.

At a less controversial operational level, Army historians have published useful special studies of various aspects of the war. Terrence J. Gough, U.S. Army Mobilization and Logistics in the Korean War (1987) provides a broad framework and literature review while John G. Westover, Combat Support in Korea (1955 and 1987) provides logistical case studies. Revealing medical statistics and analysis may be found in the Surgeon General, U.S. Army, Battle Casualties and Medical Statistics: U.S. Army Experience in the Korean War (1973); and Albert E. Cowdrey, U.S. Army in the Korean War: The Medic’s War (1987). Tactical case studies may be found in Russell A. Gugeler, Combat Actions in Korea (1954 and 1970) and William G. Robertson, Counterattack on the Naktong, 1950 (1985). These special studies are only the tip of an iceberg of unpublished studies written by officer-historians of the Eighth Army’s 5th Historical Detachment and stored in the National Archives or the U.S. Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania.

The Air Force put all its Korean War historical bombs in one bomb bay: Robert F. Futrell, The United States Air Force in Korea, 195-1953 (rev. ed., 1983), which might have been subtitled either “we could have won the war” or “we tried harder.” Futrell does the obligatory task of describing Air Force planning and operations, largely on an industrial-bureaucratic model that infers success from the level of effort, e.g. number of sorties flown, tons of bombs dropped, and readiness rates of aircraft. The Communist air war is described with inaccuracies intact since 1959. Lin Biao commands the Chinese People’s Volunteer Force; the Russian participation in the air war is minimized; the Chinese are Soviet surrogates. What is striking about Futrell’s air [page 63] campaign analysis is his limited attention to Navy and Marine Corps tactical aviation ana his party-line analysis of the issue of close air support for ground troops. In a flurry of post-Futrell studies of air employment issues, the Chief of Air Force History sponsored Korean War case studies of aviation functions: Thomas C, Hone, “Korea,” in Benjamin Franklin Cooling, ed., Air Superiority (1991), 453-504; Allan R. Millett, “Korea, 1950-1953,” in Benjamin Franklin Cooling, ed., Close Air Support (1990), 345-410; Thomas C. Hone, “Strategic Bombing Constrained: Korea and Vietnam,” in R. Cargill Hall, ed., Strategic Bombardment (in press).

Navy and Marine Corps historians do not argue that their services carried the American war effort, only that the naval services performed to higher professional standards and would have fought the Korean War harder and smarter if Navy and Marine officers had been in charge. The Navy history is James A. Field, History of United States Naval Operations Korea (1962), and the Marine Corps companion is Lynn Montross and Nicholas Ganzona, et. al., History of U.S. Marine Operations in Korea, 1950-1953, 5 vols. (1954-1972). Unlike the Army and Air Force historical programs, which keep a tight rein on official sponsorship, the Navy and Marine Corps encourage “semi-official” publication, which means that service authors writing on or off duty time can publish outside the time-consuming review and production process dictated by regulations. For the Korean War, see especially Malcolm W. Cagle and Frank A. Manson, The Sea War in Korea (1957); Richard P. Hallion, The Naval Air War in Korea (1986); Andrew Geer, The New Breed: the Story of the U.S. Marines in Korea (1952); Lynn Montross, Cavalry of the Sky: The Story of U.S. Marine Combat Helicopters (1954); and Robert D. Heinl, Victory at High Tide: The Inchon-Seoul Campaign (1968). These books are much more unabashed in service partisan bias and forthright on personalities, but they still require careful reading. For example, the 1st Marine Division, unlike its Army counterparts, never accepted raw Korean conscripts, which preserved its unit cohesion and combat performance. Instead the Marines adopted the 1st Regiment, Korean Marine Corps, manned it with their own advisors, and added it as a fourth infantry regiment to the 1st Marine Division. There are no published or unpublished studies about this alternative to the Korean Augmentation to the U.S. Army (KATUSA) program.

What is conspicuously missing from the Korean War official history library is an account written from the high ground held by the Commander-in- Chief, Far East Command/United Nations command, who dealt or should have dealt with every aspect of the war’s conduct. Mac Arthur’s own Reminiscences (1964), Ridgway’s Korean War, and Mark W. Clark, From the Danube to the [page 64] Yalu (1954) do not qualify as definitive, so the only substitutes for subjectivity are D. Clayton James, The Years of MacArthur, Vol. Ill Triumph and Disaster, 1945-1964 (1985) and Refighting the Last War: Command and Crisis in Korea, 1950-1953 (1993). The vacuum created by FECOM’s non-history perpetuates silences and allows historians to dodge crucial political issues. For example, there are no studies of Japanese collaboration in the UN war effort, interservice disagreements on strategy and operations, theater intelligence and special operations failures, relations with the Rhee regime in 1952-1953, the bitter conflict between Civil Assistance Command of United Nations Command and the United Nations Korean Reconstruction Agency, and the whole, still largely untold, story of UNC’s handling of Korean and Chinese prisoners-of-war and internees. Such subjects are not necessarily food for scandal; the Henderson School already knows much of the story. Their study would simply clarify American policies and illuminate the perceptual differences between the adversaries — and allies.

The best way to step back from an American-centric view of the war is to read the official histories of the Commonwealth allies in United Nations Command: General Sir Anthony Farrar-Hockley, The British Part in the Korean War, Vol. I, A Distant Obligation (1990) and Vol II, A Honourable Discharge (1995); Robert O’Neill, Australia in the Korean War, 2 vols (1981, 1985); Herbert Fairlie Wood, Strange Battleground: The Official History of the Canadian Army in Korea (1966); and Ian Mcgibbon, New Zealand and the Korean War (1992). These studies describe with admirable restraint the perils of fighting along side of the U.S, Army and below the U.S. Air Force, for they abound in tales of misdirected artillery and air strikes, open flanks and unannounced withdrawals, careless generals and cowardly staffs, demoralized troops, vicious allies, and wretched fire support and intelligence. The formation of the Commonwealth Division thus become more a matter of self-preservation than a deepened commitment.

Whatever their shortcomings as authors, public historians make possible other histories of warfare. They preserve documents and, today, tapes and disks. They conduct battlefield interviews and take photographs. They create cartographic records, now essential as “graphics” drive more battles than printed operations orders. They keep diaries and logs if present in a campaign. They insure that intelligence staffs preserve enemy sources of information. They often write voluminous unpublished studies and reports that lay the foundation for publishable books. They become institutional memory. The one thing public historians cannot do well is to push their work beyond the definitions of usability and appropriateness as determined by their bureaucratic [page 65] superiors. Public historians of warfare, therefore, are locked into organizational values that stress success, not failure, and focus on the conduct of battle, not the causes and consequences of war. Although the research and writing standards for public historians are much the same as for academic historians, the former must plow the straight furrow while the latter blow up the whole field.

THE POPULAR HISTORIANS AND THE KOREAN WAR

For all their limitations the scholarly books on war still remain the literary equivalent of the music of Aaron Copeland and Ralph Vaughn Williams— rich in national melodies, slightly dissonant, a mix of simple and complex themes, evocative. Popular military history is the equivalent of John Philip Sousa marches and the tunes of Gilbert and Sullivan, some very good, most forgettable and repetitive, and some horrible. The literature on the Korean War reflects this condition.

Discounting the shallow instant histories of the 1950s, the first serious popular histories proved more durable than one might have predicted: David Rees, Korea: The Limited War (1964) and T.R. Fehrenbach, This Kind of War: A Study of Unpreparedness (1963). Written by a British international journalist and a Texas reporter and history buff, these books remained in print for most of the next thirty years because they were well-written, communicated strong themes, and celebrated the wisdom of United Nations intervention. Rees’ book echoed the views of the Western allies and fellow Europeanists: Korea was worth fighting for, but not too hard and not too long. Reissued by the U.S. Army in 1993, This Kind of War proved popular with serving soldiers, veterans, and Cold Warriors in general, in part because it stressed the price in lives of self-deceptive diplomacy and poor military readiness. Only slightly less successful in appeal and content, Robert Leckie, Conflict: The History of the Korean War (1962) rounded out the first wave of pro-intervention histories. The next popular histories carried on the theme of a nasty job well done by the U.S. Eighth Army: General Matthew B. Ridgway, The Korean War (1967) and General J. Lawton Collins, War in Peacetime (1969), both a refreshing escape from the Vietnam War travails.

After a decade of neglect, the Korean War returned as a literary phenomenon and returned with a degree of intensity that belies the characterization “forgotten.” Three books stand out for their research, readable prose, and keen insight: Max Hastings, The Korean War (1987); Clay Blair, The Forgotten War: America in Korea, 1950-1953 (1987); and John Toland, In Mortal [page 66] Combat: Korea, 195-1953 (1991). Books of lesser merit crowded the bookstores: Bevin Alexander, Korea: The First War We Lost (1986); Joseph C. Goulden, Korea. The Untold Story of the War (1982); four books by Edwin P. Hoyt; two volumes of oral history by Donald Knox and Alfred Coppel; James L. Stokesbury, A Short History of the Korean War (1988); and Richard Whelan, Drawing the Line: The Korean War, 195-1953 (1990). No doubt there will be more popular histories as the war’s fiftieth anniversary approaches. If the popular historians run to form, they will continue to remember the same things about the war and continue to forget much of the story.

The popular histories of the Korean War have some striking similarities that limit their usefulness. They focus almost exclusively on the war itself, and the conventional part (1950-1953) at that. They see the war through American eyes; only Hastings, an admirer of the British army, and Toland, an admirer of Asians, provide exceptions. With their sights on the U.S. Eighth Army, the authors ignore the enemy and neglect the allies. They write about the war as anti-Clauswitzians, separating the experience of battle from its purposes. Their war is the “face of battle” (mostly Caucasian), a hard march into the land of “the naked and the dead” (mostly American), an exploration of the “thin red line” between courage, despair, and madness. Discussions of strategy, planning, logistics, command and control, fire support integration, troop training, and all the professional issues that keep officers busy impress popular historians little. Blair and Hastings are the exceptions, which makes their books more interesting. Toland likes anecdotes more than operational issues, but at least he takes the Koreans and Chinese seriously. The other authors are basically story-tellers.

The common thread in the popular histories is their authors mix of military and literary history. They are the war’s junior officers, NCOs, and war correspondents; they are spokesmen for the troops who fought the war. They can catch the thrill of victory and agony of death and defeat in combat, but they have difficulty seeing the war in political terms. Accepting their assumptions and interpretations is like letting infantry lieutenants and sergeants define a war’s value; there is a point where personal involvement necessarily defines one’s universe and values. The story-tellers cannot be dismissed because their research is thin; most of them use the official histories, although selectively. The major problem is the influence of modern journalism and pulp fiction. The story-tellers never met an interviewee they didn’t like or piles of documents they wanted to read. Suspicious of military organizations and organization men, they fly like moths to the flame to charismatic generals. The South Korean army, for example, apparently had only two senior officers, Generals [page 67] Paik Sun Yup and Chung Il Kwon. General Matthew B. Ridgway cleansed the Eighth Army’s Augean stable of command, but few American soldiers let alone civilians can tell you who brought the Eighth Army to true greatness in the campaign of 1951. The Koreans know General James Van Fleet better than most Americans; his statue, not Ridgway’s, graces the grounds of the Korean Military Academy.

The popular historians miss almost everything that happened outside Eighth Army’s tactical universe. They understand that the battle of Chipyong- ni in February, 1951 proved that the Eighth Army could destroy Chinese divisions on cold nights and do so with awesome killing power. Chipyong-ni is today’s favorite staff ride, but one looks in vain for any account of the ROK 9th Division’s two battles for White Horse Mountain in October and November, 1952, which proved that South Korean soldiers could hold any position against the most stubborn Chinese attacks provided that they had U.S. Army levels of artillery support. The ROK army’s self-confidence, however, took a dive in July, 1953 when the Chinese People’s Volunteer Force attacked and pummeled six ROK divisions in the Kumsong-Pukhan sector, a week-long offensive that persuaded Syngman Rhee to accept an armistice, however aggravating. The ROK army could not yet stand alone.

The popular historians understated the salience of the POW repatriation issue and the continuation of the war in 1952-1953. The survival stories of allied POWs are always arresting, even if ofttold tales. The more interesting issue is the struggle for the hearts and minds of the Korean and Chinese POWs, whose unwillingness to be repatriated turned United Nations Command compounds into battlegrounds for almost two years. For one thing the Rhee administration was in no hurry to process South Koreans impressed into the North Korean People’s Army; the number of potential subversives looked too menacing. One relatively certain way to sort out the loyal and defecting POWs was religious conversion. Where psyops falter, call in evangelism. Presbyterian and Methodist missionaries, American and Korean, went behind the wire and reinforced the non-repatriates’ determination to seek freedom and salvation. One will look in vain for this story in either the Henderson School books or the official histories, both camps apparently discomfited by religious conviction.

Syngman Rhee does not fare well with the popular historians, when they choose to deal with him. Rhee is the distant dictator, the aged exile who is too clever when he doesn’s need to be and too given to political repression. No Woodrow Wilson, Rhee, nevertheless, faced problems of building support that could not be solved without extralegal recourse to American economic aid. [page 68] Corruption? By 1950s if not 1870s standards, the United States government had to worry about corruption but not too much if it wanted the ROK government and army to remain firm. Did Rhee fear he would lose U.S. aid? Yes — not least because he knew that Eighth Army had a plan to move against him (Operation Eveready) if he balked at an armistice. Everyday depended on ROK army defections, so Rhee naturally paid some attention to which generals commanded the crucial internal security formation like the Martial Law Command and the Counterintelligence Corps. Rhee saw no reason to hurry his own departure by bowing to American political sensibilities.

CONCLUSION

The history of the Korean War will continue to reflect the influence of Cold War politics and the revulsion for the Vietnam War until younger American academics seize the field from their ideological elders, a mix of revisionists and Henderson School critics. Like much writing about American interventionism, Korean War historiography reflects some obvious and unspoken assumptions that require rethinking: (1) the native politicians are easily manipulated and coopted; (2) economic influences are the principal cause of political behavior; (3) local American officials are naive and have little or no insight into native politics; (4) secular socialists are the only legitimate political leaders in a post-colonial nation; (5) American policy is driven by regional and global concerns that have no local relevance, and (6) the use of force by incumbent regimes shows their illegitimacy while insurgents are patriotic freedom fighters who can use any form of violence against anyone in their pursuit of national liberation and social justice.

Historians like to call the Korean conflict a “revolutionary war.” The def-initions of revolution, however, vary widely. For diplomatic and public-military historians, the revolution is in American foreign policy. Revisionists deplore the Korean War’s “globalization” of containment, its impact on U.S. relations with China and Japan, its encouragement of McCarthyism, and its stimulus for the tripling of U.S. defense spending. Pro-containment champions admit the changes and applaud them except McCarthysim, since American rearmament and alliance building brought an end to the worst Stalinist imperialism. The Henderson School uses revolution to describe the frustrated socialist-democratic liberation movement of 1945, the reformist anti-Japanese popular uprising that produced the People’s Committees. The American-rightist Korean alliance crushed this authentic revolution, polarized left and right, and [page 69] produced a war that divided the Korean people into extremist warring societies.

The challenge for any future historian of the Korean War is to bring elements of these definitions of revolutionary conflict into some sort of synthesis since both have some validity. It is a daunting challenge, but one that other historians have when met writing about other wars.

NOTES

1. For examples of the contemporary concerns of academic historians, see Eric Foner, ed. for the American Historical Association, The New American History (Philadelphia, Pa.: Temple University Press, 1990) and David Thelen, et. al., eds., The Practice of American History: A Special Issue of the Journal of American History 81 (December, 1994).

In a sample of 824 American historians surveyed by the Organizations of American Historians in 1993, historians rated their ideological commitments (41%) and educational identity (38.7%) ahead of national allegiance (31%). Of twelve allegiances and/or identities, historians valued political party affiliation least. “What do American Historians Think,” based on 1,047 respondents, provides a revealing picture of academic and public historians. Historians said the most influential book in their development was the Bible, followed by two books by Richard Hofstadter and two by Karl Marx. Twice as many historians see the civil rights movement as more significant than World War II in American history. Not one identified the Korean War as one of forty-five “bright spots” or “dark spots” in American history.

2. The challenges of writing the history of wars and military organizations may be sampled in several important essays by academic-public historians: Louis Morton, “The Historian and the Study of War,” Mississippi Valley Historical Review 48 (March, 1962), 599-613; Peter Paret, “The History of War, “ Daedalus 100 (Spring, 1971), 376-396; Allan R. Millett, “American Military History: Struggling through the Wire,” in ACTA No. 2, “Proceedings of the VIII Coloquy of the International Commission for Military History,” 1975; Reginald C. Stuart, “War, Society and the ‘New’ Military History of the United States,” Canadian Review of American Studies 8 (Spring, 1977), 1-10; Paul Kennedy, “The Fall and Rise of Military History” Yale Journal of World Affairs 1 (Fall, 1989), 12-19; Ronald H. Spector, “Military History and the Academic World,” Army History 19 (Summer, 1991), 1-7; and the essays in David A. Charters, Marc Milner, and J. Brent Wilson, eds., Military History and the Military Profession (Westport, Ct.: Praeger, 1992). Of course, the Korean War is not the historical monopoly of Anglo-American historians, and we are learning more from Chinese and Russian accounts and documents as those works find their way to the West in their original or in translation. [page 70] At the moment the Chinese perspective is in sharper focus than the Russian, but both are sufficiently detailed and document-based to leave little doubt about what and when the Chinese and Russians made critical interventionist decisions. Matters of motive and calculation could use more clarification, if only to illuminate the North Korean role. The works of South Korean scholars are legion, even in translation, and any Western scholar must know the books and articles of Kim Chum-kon, Kim Chull-buam, Lee Chae-jin, Yoo Tae-hoo, Kim Gye-dong, Suh Dae-suk, B.C. Koh, Ra Jong-il, and, specially, Ohn Chang-il and Kim Hak-joon. Among Japanese students of the war the leader is Ryo Hagiwara. South Korean scholarship on the war, much of which depends on foreign docu-mentation, has its own peculiarities, political and organizational, and should be evaluated in accordance with its own problems. These are the sharp division between military-sponsored operational studies and academic history, which is relentless in the search for causes of the war and avoids study of the war’s conduct and the attendant problems of nation-building and military reform in the throes of war. For a review of international trends in Korean War research, see Kim Hak-joon, “International Trends in Korean War Studies,” Korea and World Affairs 15 (Summer, 1990) 326-370.

3. Melvyn P. Leffler, “New Approaches, Old Interpretations, and Prospective Reconfigurations,” Diplomatic History 19 (Spring, 1995), 173-196.

4. Rosemary Foot, “Making Known the Unknown War: Policy Analysis of the Korean Conflict in the Last Decade,” Diplomatic History 15 (Summer, 1991) 411-431; William Stueck, “The Korean War as International History,” Diplomatic History 10 (Fall, 1986), 291-309; Judith Munro-Leighton, “A Postrevisionist Scrutiny of America’s Role in the Cold War in Asia, 1945-1950,” Journal of American-East Asian Relations 1 (Spring, 1992) 73-98.

5. Jon Halliday, “What Happened in Korea? Rethinking Korean History, 1945- 1953,” Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars 5 (November, 1973), 36-44; Bruce Cumings, “Korean-American Relations: A Century of Contact and Thirty-Five Years of Intimacy,” in Warren I. Cohen, New Frontiers in American-East Asian Relations: Essays Presented to Dorothy Borg (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 237-282.

6. On the development of military-utilitarian history, see P.H. Kampheris, ed., Mili-tary History Around the World, deel 14, Mededelingen van de Sectie Militaire Geschiedenis, ‘s-Gravenhage, The Hague, The Netherlands, 1991.

7. Allan R. Millett, “A Reader’s Guide to the Korean War: A Review Essay,” Joint Forces Journal No. 7 (Spring, 1995), 119-126.