

The Coldest Winter: America and the Korean War

By David Halberstam

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"In a grand gesture of reclamation and remembrance, Mr. Halberstam has brought the war back home."

--*The New York Times* David Halberstam's magisterial and thrilling *The Best and the Brightest* was the defining book about the Vietnam conflict. More than three decades later, Halberstam used his unrivaled research and formidable journalistic skills to shed light on another pivotal moment in our history: the Korean War. Halberstam considered *The Coldest Winter* his most accomplished work, the culmination of forty-five years of writing about America's postwar foreign policy. Halberstam gives us a masterful narrative of the political decisions and miscalculations on both sides. He charts the disastrous path that led to the massive entry of Chinese forces near the Yalu River and that caught Douglas MacArthur and his soldiers by surprise. He provides astonishingly vivid and nuanced portraits of all the major figures-Eisenhower, Truman, Acheson, Kim, and Mao, and Generals MacArthur, Almond, and Ridgway. At the same time, Halberstam provides us with his trademark highly evocative narrative journalism, chronicling the crucial battles with reportage of the highest order. As ever, Halberstam was concerned with the extraordinary courage and resolve of people asked to bear an extraordinary burden. *The Coldest Winter* is contemporary history in its most literary and luminescent form, providing crucial perspective on every war America has been involved in since. It is a book that Halberstam first decided to write more than thirty years ago and that took him nearly ten years to complete. It stands as a lasting testament to one of the greatest journalists and historians of our time, and to the fighting men whose heroism it chronicles.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

David Halberstam's magisterial and thrilling *The Best and the Brightest* was the defining book for the Vietnam War. More than three decades later, Halberstam used his unrivalled research and formidable journalistic skills to shed light on another dark corner in our history: the Korean War. *The Coldest Winter* is a successor to *The Best and the Brightest*, even though in historical terms it precedes it. Halberstam considered *The Coldest Winter* the best book he ever wrote, the culmination of forty-five years of writing about America's postwar foreign policy.

Up until now, the Korean War has been the black hole of modern American history. *The Coldest Winter* changes that. Halberstam gives us a masterful narrative of the political decisions and miscalculations on both sides. He charts the disastrous path that led to the massive entry of Chinese forces near the Yalu, and that caught Douglas MacArthur and his soldiers by surprise. He provides astonishingly vivid and nuanced portraits of all the major figures -- Eisenhower, Truman, Acheson, Kim, and Mao, and Generals MacArthur, Almond, and Ridgway. At the same time, Halberstam provides us with his trademark highly evocative narrative journalism, chronicling the crucial battles with reportage of the highest order.

At the heart of the book are the individual stories of the soldiers on the front lines who were left to deal with the consequences of the dangerous misjudgments and competing agendas of powerful men. We meet them, follow them, and see some of the most dreadful battles in history through their eyes. As ever, Halberstam was concerned with the extraordinary courage and resolve of people asked to bear an extraordinary burden.

The Coldest Winter is contemporary history in its most literary and luminescent form, and provides crucial perspective on the Vietnam War and the events of today. It was a book that Halberstam first decided to write more than thirty years ago and that took him nearly ten years to write. It stands as a lasting testament to one of the greatest journalists and historians of our time, and to the fighting men whose heroism it chronicles.

Includes an Afterword by Russell Baker

Tributes to David Halberstam

David Halberstam died at the age of 73 in a car accident in California on April 23, 2007, just after completing *The Coldest Winter*. Legendary for his work ethic, his kindness to young writers, and his unbending moral spine, Halberstam had friends and admirers throughout journalism, many of whom spoke at his memorial service and at readings across the country for the release of *The Coldest Winter*. We have included testimonials given at his memorial service by two writers who made their reputations at the same newspaper where he won a Pulitzer Prize for his Vietnam War reporting, *The New York Times*:

Anna Quindlen

...David occupied a lot of space on the planet. Perhaps he felt the price he must pay for that big voice, that big reach, that big reputation, was that his generosity had to be just as large. Most of us, when we take to the road and meet admiring strangers, vow afterward to answer the note pressed into our hands or to pass along the speech we promised to the person whose daughter couldn't be there to hear it. But with the best will in the world we arrive home to deadlines, bills, kids, friends, all the demands of a busy life. We mean to be our

best selves, but often we forget.

David did it. He always did it. The note, the call, the book, the advice. When I mentioned this once he dug his hands deep into the pockets of his grey flannels, set his mouth at the corners, looked down and rumbled, "Well, but it's so easy." That's nonsense. It's not easy. But it is important, and why he has been remembered with enormous affection by ordinary readers all over this country, and why each of us who live some sort of public life would do well, with all due respect to Jesus, to ask ourselves about those small encounters: what would David do? ... **Read her full tribute**

Dexter Filkins

...If I could use a sports metaphor--and I think David would have appreciated that--David was the pulling guard, as in a football game. The pulling guard who sweeps wide and clears the hole for the running back who runs through behind him. We reporters in Iraq were the running backs. David went first--a long time ago--and cleared the way.

In Iraq, when the official version didn't match what we were seeing on the streets of Baghdad, all we had to do--and we did it a lot--was ask ourselves: what would Halberstam have done? And then the way was clear.... **Read his full tribute**

A Timeline of the Korean War

How It Began

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| January 1950 | Secretary of State Dean Acheson leaves Korea out of America's Far East Defense Perimeter. |
| June 25, 1950 | The North Korean Army crosses the 38th parallel with a force of about 135,000 troops. The Republic of Korea is taken completely by surprise by the invasion and their forces are soon in full retreat. |
| July 7, 1950 | General Douglas MacArthur is officially put in command of the forces set to defend the Republic of Korea. |
| August 1950 | Relentlessly focused attacks by the North Koreans drive the ill-prepared defense forces into the country's southeast corner. The Pusan Perimeter is established as the last best hope of maintaining a toehold on the peninsula. |
| August-Sept. 1950 | The North Koreans launch assault after assault against the Pusan Perimeter, with particularly brutal fighting taking place along the Naktong River. U.S. soldiers are in constant danger of being overrun. |

September 15, 1950

MacArthur delivers his masterstroke with the amphibious landings at Inchon. The invasion blindsides the North Korean defenders and relieves pressure on the Pusan Perimeter. UN forces are able to drive north from Pusan and east from Inchon. By the end of September the North Korean forces are routed on all fronts, Seoul has been recaptured, and MacArthur receives permission to cross the 38th parallel.

The Debacle

November 1950

U.S. soldiers march deep into North Korean territory, eventually reaching the Yalu River border with China. But the first warning of a conflict with the Chinese takes place at Unsan, where the Eighth Cavalry is mauled by a surprise engagement. By the end of November Chinese Communist forces mount a major offensive at Kunuri and the Chosin Reservoir.

December 1950

Overwhelmed by hundreds of thousands of Chinese soldiers, UN forces are battered to positions below the 38th parallel. General Walker is killed in an accident, and General Ridgway takes over his command. General MacArthur lobbies relentlessly for attacks into China, an action that would draw China, and likely the USSR, into a full-scale war. Tensions between Truman and MacArthur escalate.

January-February 1951

The Chinese reach the high-water mark of their assault. General Ridgway aggressively combats the Chinese in the fight for the central corridor, with major battles fought at Wonju, Twin Tunnels, and Chipyeongni.

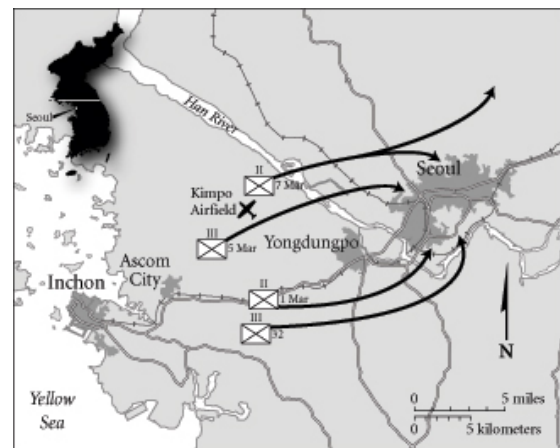
April 11, 1951

Truman relieves General MacArthur of his duties. Raucous public outcry in support of the celebrated general further erodes Truman's popularity.

The End

July 27, 1953

After years of bloody stalemate, a cease-fire is signed between North Korea and the UN. The border established is very close to the original line at the 38th parallel. It is estimated that the war cost 33,000 American, 415,000 South Korean, and up to 1.5 million Chinese and North Korean lives. In the arena of U.S. foreign policy, the lessons of Korea still largely remain unlearned.



The drive to Seoul, September 16-28, 1950

From Publishers Weekly

Reviewed by James Brady At the heart of David Halberstam's massive and powerful new history of the Korean War is a bloody, losing battle fought in November 1950 in the snow-covered mountains of North Korea by outnumbered American GIs and Marines against the Chinese Communist Army. Halberstam's villain is not North Korea's Kim Il Sung or China's Chairman Mao or even the Soviet Union's Josef Stalin, who pulled the strings. It's the legendary general Douglas MacArthur, the aging, arrogant, politically ambitious architect of what the author calls the single greatest American military miscalculation of the war, MacArthur's decision to go all the way to the Yalu [River] because he was sure the Chinese would not come in. Much of the story is familiar. What distinguishes this version by Halberstam (who died this year in a California auto crash) is his reportorial skill, honed in Vietnam in Pulitzer-winning dispatches to the *New York Times*. His pounding narrative, in which GIs and generals describe their coldest winter, whisks the reader along, even though we know the ending. Most Korean War scholars agree that MacArthur's sprint to the border of great China with a Siberian winter coming on resulted in a lethal nightmare. Though focused on that mountain battle, Halberstam's book covers the entire war, from the sudden dawn attack by Kim Il Sung's Soviet-backed North Koreans against the U.S.-trained South, on June 25, 1950, to its uneasy truce in 1953. It was a smallish war but a big Cold War story: Harry Truman, Stalin and Mao, Joe McCarthy and Eisenhower, George C. Marshall and Omar Bradley, among others, stride through it. A few quibbles: there were no B-17 bombers destroyed on Wake Island the day after Pearl Harbor, as Halberstam asserts, and Halberstam gives his minor characters too much attention. At first MacArthur did well, toughing out those early months when the first GIs sent in from cushy billets in occupied Japan were overwhelmed by Kim's rugged little peasant army. MacArthur's greatest gamble led to a marvelous turning point: the invasion at Inchon in September, when he outflanked the stunned Reds. After Inchon, the general headed north and his luck ran out. His sycophants, intelligence chief Willoughby and field commander Ned Almond, refused to believe battlefield evidence indicating the Chinese Communists had quietly infiltrated North Korea and were lying in wait. The Marines fought their way out as other units disintegrated. In the end, far too late, Truman sacked MacArthur. Alive with the voices of the men who fought, Halberstam's telling is a virtuoso work of history. (Sept.) James Brady, columnist at Parade and Forbes.com, is author of several books about Korea. His latest book is *Why Marines Fight* (St. Martin's, Nov.).

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From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

Publicized as a bookend to *The Best and the Brightest*, *The Coldest Winter* is a fitting, if premature, conclusion to David Halberstam's illustrious career. (He died in a car accident last spring, shortly after completing the book.) Magisterial in scope, eminently readable, well researched, and even gripping at times, *Coldest Winter* is hailed as a book destined to become the subject's most popular history. Much of this success rests with the immediacy of Halberstam's storytelling, his gemlike portraits of the major players (particularly General MacArthur), and his close-up descriptions of the trenches. The *Miami Herald* accuses Halberstam of inappropriately lifting his framework from *Best and Brightest* to fit *Coldest Winter*; other reviewers note factual errors and an overly epic (and sometimes numbingly detailed) story. But in the end, *Coldest Winter* is not only a compelling history but a story that resounds loudly today.

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Carla McFarlin:

The book *The Coldest Winter: America and the Korean War* can give more knowledge and information

about everything you want. Exactly why must we leave the best thing like a book *The Coldest Winter: America and the Korean War*? Several of you have a different opinion about reserve. But one aim in which book can give many info for us. It is absolutely correct. Right now, try to closer together with your book. Knowledge or information that you take for that, it is possible to give for each other; it is possible to share all of these. Book *The Coldest Winter: America and the Korean War* has simple shape nevertheless, you know: it has great and large function for you. You can look the enormous world by start and read a guide. So it is very wonderful.

Meredith Butler:

Reading a e-book can be one of a lot of action that everyone in the world likes. Do you like reading book therefore. There are a lot of reasons why people enjoy it. First reading a book will give you a lot of new facts. When you read a reserve you will get new information simply because book is one of various ways to share the information or maybe their idea. Second, looking at a book will make you actually more imaginative. When you studying a book especially fictional book the author will bring you to imagine the story how the people do it anything. Third, you may share your knowledge to some others. When you read this *The Coldest Winter: America and the Korean War*, you can tells your family, friends and also soon about yours reserve. Your knowledge can inspire average, make them reading a e-book.

Donna Solano:

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Sharon Baker:

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