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Review of *Korea: War Without End* by Richard Dannatt & Robert Lyman

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to defend himself against post-war criticism of him, some in the deluge of memoirs by politicians and senior officers, and sometimes in the courts.

This edited volume is a welcome addition to the historiography of the Second World War as it draws on papers not available to the researcher, unlike the papers of other senior officers such as Alanbrooke. It's not unknown for an editor to select papers which show the subject in a favourable light but in this case the selection is one which shows both the strengths and weaknesses of Dorman-Smith. There are also numerous footnotes which provide extra information both about events and the individuals mentioned. Greacen does not claim to be a military expert and her commentary is supplemented by that of a military historian, John Lee, who provides explanations of the events before and during First El Alamein. The volume offers a valuable insight into why Dorman-Smith was a military maverick but certainly not a genius. It shows a picture of a complex and difficult man and as a result there was no shortage of candidates to be his worst enemy, one of whom was happy to end his army career.

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Richard Dannatt & Robert Lyman, *Korea: War Without End*. Oxford: Osprey, 2024. 328 pp., 7 maps, 31 photographs. ISBN 978-1472869753 (hardback). Price £25.00

The Korean War (1950-53) is often referred to in the West as having been 'forgotten'. Sandwiched between the unconditional surrender of Axis forces at the end of the Second World War and the failed intervention in Vietnam during the subsequent couple of decades, it is too often seen as an adjunct to the former or a precursor of the latter. Fought by Second World War commanders, using weapons that would not have been out of place on the battlefields of 1944 and 1945, it is perhaps far too easy to dismiss the conflict as 'more of the same'. However, the Korean War was an early manifestation of East-West tensions which would dominate the geo-political agenda through to the early 1990s and, so it seems, well into the twenty first century. In this ground-breaking book, the authors offer up a reassessment of the Korean War which will, no doubt, accentuate its' historical relevance. Additionally, elements of this book can be viewed as a case study supporting conclusions reached by the authors in their 2024 collaboration, *Victory to Defeat*. Richard Dannatt and Robert Lyman, are, after all, particularly well qualified to address this topic. The former is a highly

decorated military commander and the latter, who attained the rank of Major in the British Army, a respected military historian.

The authors divide the Korean War into two distinct phases. The first was the United Nations (UN) led intervention following North Korea's unprovoked and illegal invasion of the Republic of South Korea (ROK) on 25 June 1950. Post 1945 military cutbacks left Western forces ill-prepared, and as a result the well-equipped and highly motivated Korean People's Army, the *In Mun Gun*, nearly achieved reunification, pushing the ROK forces, along with those of their UN sponsored allies, back into a pocket centred around the southern coastal city of Pusan. The book vividly describes the chaotic retreat. However, the allied lines eventually stabilised and Douglas MacArthur's masterful amphibious counter stroke at Inchon drove the North Koreans back to the original border. The authors argue that at this point, the UN's legitimacy was affirmed, and *jus ad bellum* (the right to wage war) had been achieved.

The second phase, the authors contend, was a catastrophic overreach. Despite President Truman's desire for de-escalation, UN forces invaded North Korea on 16 October 1950. This provoked a massive Chinese intervention, a threat MacArthur had dismissed. The controls which normally determine the parameters within which military commanders operate were lacking in that the US Government's policy of non-escalation was sidelined by a man who had accumulated an unprecedented amount of power and influence. The authors make a strong argument that whilst MacArthur excelled at the operational art, his appreciation of strategy was severely lacking. Indeed, MacArthur was replaced by Matthew Ridgway after the UN-led invasion of the North had failed to achieve the anticipated result – the reunification of Korea under the ROK president, Syngman Rhee.

Aside from strategic considerations, the authors offer up two further criticisms of the UNs prosecution of the war after the original 1950 line of delineation had been restored. The first concerns the legal justification for the UN led invasion of the North. Whilst the original intervention in June 1950 had legal legitimacy, the subsequent Allied counter stroke did not. The second criticism concerns the question of proportionality and the heavy toll paid by non-combatants. The number of civilian deaths was astronomical and outstrips in relative terms any previous war of recent memory. Indeed, North Korea lost over 16% of its' population and most cities north of the DMZ were reduced to rubble. However, while acknowledging the conflict could have ended earlier, the authors rightfully place overall responsibility for the war on Kim Il-sung.

Both phases of the war concluded at the 38th Parallel. Restoration of the status quo cost the Republic of China almost one million combatants. UN losses were of a much lower magnitude and many of them were incurred during the final year of the war,

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when each side fought to consolidate their positions along the restored, albeit still fluid, border. Ridgway's leadership during this period is commended for holding the line and protecting South Korea. Whilst the final eighteen months of the war became a struggle to consolidate lines of control, the ferocity of the fighting should not be underestimated. To this point, a couple of chapters are devoted to the *Battle of Imjin River*, a heroic story of vastly outnumbered primarily British defenders achieving the seemingly impossible – akin to the defence of Kohima against the Japanese in 1944. The device of blending the comprehensive eye-witness account of a National Service Subaltern with a historians' view works well. The men of the British 29 Infantry Brigade had much to be proud, and no more so than the 1st Battalion, The Gloucestershire Regiment.

In summary, Dannett and Lyman offer a compelling critique of Allied conduct in the Korean War, drawing heavily on extensive primary and secondary resources, including the Truman Office Files (Harry S. Truman Library). The war ended in an armistice, not a peace deal and in the final two chapters the authors reflect on how it might have ended, and how it still might. By framing the conflict in two distinct phases, they have succeeded in elevating its' historical significance, hopefully raising awareness and promoting remembrance of the millions of lives lost in what was a particularly bloody conflict. A deeper understanding of what has gone before is crucial for future decisions, though reconciliation between North and South Korea remains elusive.

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