



From the Hudson to the Yalu: West Point '49 in the Korean War (Williams-Ford Texas A&M University Military History Series)

Harry J. Maihafer

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They entered West Point shortly before the end of World War II. Four years later the class of USMA '49 graduated amid peacetime military cutbacks and national complacency. A year later these young officers were plunged into a cruel and unexpected war and were forced to compensate, by valor and leadership, for the nation's unpreparedness. Some called it a U.N. Police Action, but to the 2nd lieutenants fighting as platoon leaders, forward observers, and jet pilots, it was war to the fullest. Men of '49 served along the Naktong Perimeter, landed at Inchon, flew combat missions against Chinese MiG's, and fought the war of maneuver, and of stalemate, from Pusan to the Yalu. They fought well - some to their death. These are their individual stories, based on the '49ers' own firsthand accounts, of what it was like to enter combat, as one said "green as grass, " and suddenly face life-and-death responsibility for American troops entrusted to their care. It is the story of men such as Sam Coursen, awarded the Medal of Honor for rescuing a wounded comrade at the cost of his own life; of Ranger hero Ralph Puckett, fighting off the initial Chinese onslaught; of D. D. Overton, becoming an ace as he scores his fifth aerial victory; or of Herb Marshburn, dying heroically as he leads men trying to escape a Chinese trap. The author, who went to Korea as an armored officer but wound up leading an infantry platoon, uses his own story as a narrative framework for this chronicle of the Korean War years. He brings the big picture to life by means of vivid stories of that "forgotten war, " told by men who knew it face-to-face at the junior officer level.

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