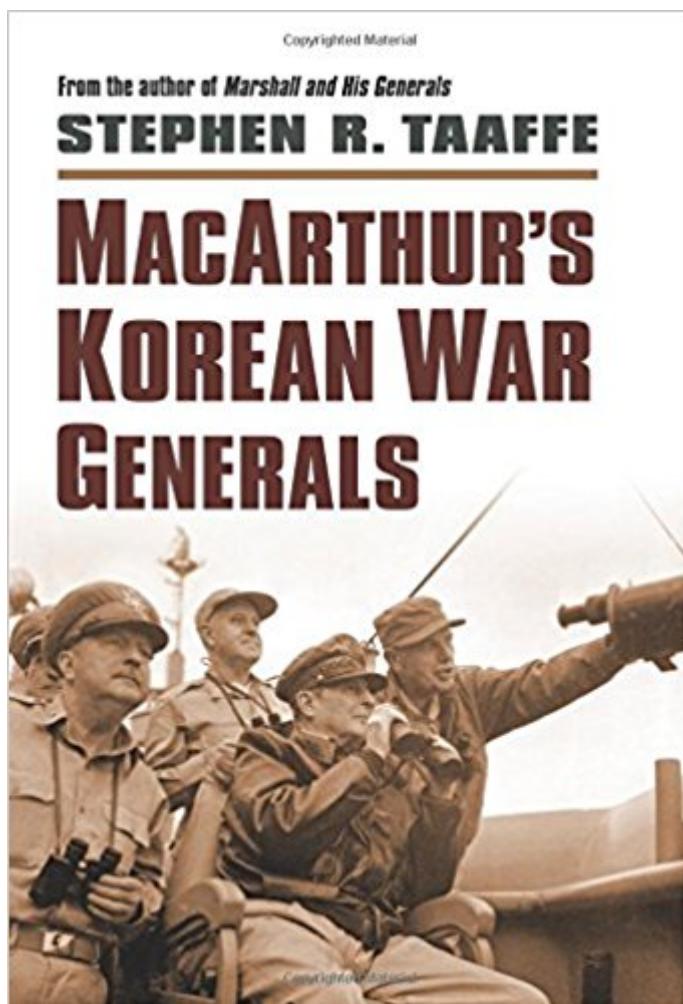


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# MacArthur's Korean War Generals (Modern War Studies)



## Synopsis

Wedged chronologically between World War II and Vietnam, the Korean War— which began with North Korea’s invasion of South Korea in June of 1950— possessed neither the virtuous triumphalism of the former nor the tragic pathos of the latter. Most Americans supported defending South Korea, but there was considerable controversy during the war as to the best means to do so—and the question was at least as exasperating for American army officers as it was for the general public. A longtime historian of American military leadership in the crucible of war, Stephen R. Taaffe takes a close critical look at how the highest ranking field commanders of the Eighth Army acquitted themselves in the first, decisive year in Korea. Because an army is no better than its leadership, his analysis opens a new perspective on the army’s performance in Korea, and on the conduct of the war itself. In that first year, the Eighth Army’s leadership ran the gamut from impressive to lackluster—a surprising unevenness since so many of the high-ranking officers had been battle-tested in World War II. Taaffe attributes these leadership difficulties to the army’s woefully unprepared state at the war’s start, army personnel policies, and General Douglas MacArthur’s corrosive habit of manipulating his subordinates and pitting them against each other. He explores the personalities at play, their pre-war experiences, the manner of their selection, their accomplishments and failures, and, of course, their individual relationships with each other and MacArthur. By explaining who these field, corps, and division commanders were, Taaffe exposes the army’s institutional and organizational problems that contributed to its up-and-down fortunes in Korea in 1950—1951. Providing a better understanding of MacArthur’s controversial generalship, Taaffe’s book offers new and invaluable insight into the army’s life-and-death struggle in America’s least understood conflict.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Taaffe writes with smoothness, clarity, and verve. . . Personal profiles extend beyond background and training to personality traits and idiosyncrasies, including thoughtful and balanced assessments of individual strengths and weaknesses." •H-Net Reviews "Taaffe has done a service for students of the Korean War of US Army Institutional history. His generally direct, clearly written evaluations of the performance of men like MacArthur, Ridgway, and the troublesome X Corps commander Ned Almond are judicious and carefully reasoned." •Michigan War Studies Review "Those interested in the Korean War are sure to want MacArthur's Korean War Generals on their bookshelf. Taaffe's insights will cause readers to reevaluate their understanding of the war as well as their assessment of the army's senior leadership at the time." •Military Review "An outstanding study, adding considerably to one's understanding of Korean War military leadership and operations." •Korean Journal of Military History "Offers important insights into and background on the army generals who led U.S. forces during the first thirteen months of the Korean War." •Journal of Military History "Anybody who wants to understand how the US Army fought in the Korean War needs to read this book. Taaffe is especially interesting on the personal relationships between senior officers." •Thomas E. Ricks, author of *Fiasco* and *The Generals: American Military Command from World War II to Today* "Taaffe is a master storyteller, analyst, and researcher who provides commendable balance to a subject that has often produced polemics. His extensive use of oral history and background on World War II military leadership enable him to provide insights that will inform specialists, buffs, and general readers alike." •William Stueck, author of *Rethinking the Korean War: A New Diplomatic and Strategic History* "A terrific study of America's military leadership during the Korean War. Taaffe is remarkably even-handed, providing praise where it is appropriate and criticism where it is deserved. The book offers insights into topics ranging from the critical tactical and strategic decisions of the war to the impact of more petty politics and personal relationships. Beautifully-written and thoroughly-researched, MacArthur's Korean War Generals offers lessons that still resonate today for the Korean Peninsula and beyond." •Mitchell Lerner, Director of Korean Studies, The Ohio State University

of the best US Army history studies on the Korean War. Taaffe successfully explains that, although the US Eighth Army was unprepared for the war, its field commanders made the difference in the success of the UNF operations because of their leadership style, combat experience, and command skills. There were divergent views on how to fight the war at MacArthur's HQs. Taaffe assesses the dissimilar war-fighting strategies through the lens of the differing military careers and political considerations of the generals, who had been able to make good use of their experiences from WWII that made the Eighth Army a competent fighting force in Korea. They consolidated the UNF defense line, pushed for offensive campaigns into North Korea, built the confidence in fighting back the Communist invasions, and transformed the US Army from a WWII "liberation force" to a Cold War "containment force". A milestone in US military leadership research of the Korean War. It is highly recommended. •Xiaobing Li, co-editor and translator of Mao's Generals Remember Korea

Stephen R. Taaffe is professor of history at Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas. He is the author of Marshall and His Generals: U.S. Army Commanders in World War II and MacArthur's Jungle War: The 1944 New Guinea Campaign, both from Kansas.

Great companion to Marshall and his generals. Time for a Vietnam volume

Knowledgeable, thoughtful and full of insights.

Leadership in the Crucible Stephen Taaffe, MacArthur's Korean War Generals (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2016). This is an outstanding contribution to war literature in general and the history of the Korean War in particular. Taaffe's evaluations of the 21 generals who fought in the first phases of that war as commanders of the Eighth Army and its various corps and divisions are balanced, judicious and fair as he carefully weights the contributions of such men as David Barr, Hobart Hap Gay, John Coulter, Lawrence Dutch Keiser, Robert Shorty Soule, William Kean, Frank Shrimp Milburn along with the better known Walton Walker, Matthew Ridgeway and James Van Fleet. For example, his assessment of General Ned Almond criticizes Almond for his penny packet, extremely diffuse X Corps lunge into north east Korea in late 1951 (under General MacArthur), but finds him a superb commander who did more than his share to save UN forces in the central Korean fighting during 1951 (under General Ridgeway). The author mixes finely granular and illuminating material

about each general together with the various geo-strategic parameters under which they operated. Having taught a course on the Korean War for 30 years and perused hundreds of articles and books, I thought that with the exception of a North Korean military and strategic account of the war and a thorough examination of the Soviet military achieves of the period (Where is Henry Glantz when we really need him?), much about that war has already been examined. But MacArthur's Generals turns out to be both a pleasant surprise - smoothly and perspicaciously written and providing many judicious insights - a most valuable addition to the war literature. Highly recommended. Christian Potholm Alva Stanwood Alexander Professor of Government Bowdoin College

The book was too repeaticious. The reader hears the same stories of the same Generals in reflections of the past and in the actuality of the time being discussed. It became boring.

A summary of the review on StrategyPage.Com' Prof. Taaffe (Stephen F. Austin State) follows his "Marshall and His Generals" with this look at senior U.S. commanders in Korea. During the first year of the war, he notes that in part due to shortfalls in equipment and training, and also because some senior officers had had little or no combat experience in 1941-1945, the army was not only unready, but its performance was often uneven, the situation at times made worse by MacArthur's command style, preferring sycophants over abler but less deferential men, particularly in staff positions. Some of the men discussed come off well, notably Lt. Gen. Walton Walker, who gets a far more favorable treatment than in many accounts, and the USMC's Maj. Gen. Oliver Smith, while others, notably Lt. Gen. Edward Almond, have the prevailing negative views confirmed. As he discusses these and many other officers Taaffe also gives us a rather good overview of the Korean War.' For the full review, see StrategyPage.Com

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