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### In Mortal Combat: Korea, 1950-53

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done well to admit error and pay China an indemnity to free *Amethyst*. It is a sad fact of international life that revolutionaries are so inflamed with passion for their cause that they cannot see reason and act upon its dictates.

These points aside, *Hostage on the Yangtze* deserves to carry on its dust jacket the word that tops the British lexicon of praise: Splendid!

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Toland, John. *In Mortal Combat: Korea, 1950-53*. New York: William Morrow, 1991. 624pp. \$25

At the conclusion of World War II, the United States underwent wholesale demobilization of its armed forces. President Truman, in opposition to the senior military and James Forrestal, drastically cut defense budgets from 1947 to 1950. At the same time, the U.S. was struggling in the early days of the containment policy with several major political and economic problems, such as the rebuilding of Europe and Japan as well as the perceived threat of communism in Eastern Europe and China.

The Korean War and its aftermath became a landmark event in reshaping the direction of U.S. political and military strategy for the coming decades. It claims many firsts: the first real test of resolve to contain the spread of communism; the first "limited" war of the modern era; the first war with a backdrop of nuclear weapons; a surrogate war (for the

USSR); a United Nations coalition war; and an undeclared foreign war.

It also focused the thinking of U.S. political and military leaders about the use of force and war and the size and composition of the military. How do you conduct limited war in an alliance structure? What are the risks and gains of expanding a war? How do you define victory in a limited war? These are questions that had been asked before by theorists, but the Korean War gave them a new reality.

John Toland's splendid new popular history presents a rich panorama from the points of view of many of its heroes, villains, and survivors. Not only the first major armed conflict between communism and the West, Korea also pitted protagonists on the same side against each other: U.S. general versus U.S. general (Walker versus Almond, for example); U.S. military against U.S. press, foreshadowing things to come; and, in certainly the greatest public drama, the U.S. hero-general Douglas MacArthur against his commander in chief, Harry Truman.

There are errors enough in this book to satisfy the pickiest assistant professor of history, but Toland has presented a magnificent look at the Korean War from many vantage points and experiences. At the same time, *In Mortal Combat* upholds comprehensiveness and offers us plain good writing, with occasional wit and humor. Eighth Army commander Walton Walker's private hero was General George Patton, under whom he had served in World War II.

Walker was more subdued than Patton, of course, but according to Toland, "like his idol, he was religious but did not consider God as his personal intelligence officer."

Like most books on the Korean War, this one slights the final years of that conflict. It does chronicle the decline of domestic support, which in the Vietnam years became "the forgotten lesson of Korea."

But the most lasting domestic effect of the war, in terms of its strategic implications, was the 1952 election. Whatever chance Truman had to win, Korea finished, and his proxy Adlai Stevenson was no match for Eisenhower after the 24 October pledge—"if elected I will go to Korea." Eisenhower went, and ended the war in six months with a bit of atomic diplomacy. How important this gambit was to war termination, in comparison with Stalin's death, is still debated.

More important, after ending the war Eisenhower was determined to develop a credible strategic concept that he could implement at a fairly low cost and sell to both the American people and the nation's allies. The outcome was the New Look strategy of the 1950s, which was to have a tremendous impact at home and internationally. But that is another story.

Toland's conclusion takes us far above the scholarly realm into that of wisdom: "After writing seven histories of twentieth-century wars, I have come to a number of conclusions. It is human nature that repeats itself, not history. We often

learn more about the past from the present than the reverse. I also discovered that a vile person can occasionally tell the truth and a noble person tell a lie; and that men don't make history as often as history makes men; and that the course of history is unpredictable."

Thus, Toland may have given us his swan song as a writer of history. And an eloquently truthful one it is. His book is a great read for newcomer, expert, and those of us who fought in that forgotten war.

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Bolger, Daniel P. *Scenes from an Unfinished War: Low-Intensity Conflict in Korea, 1966-1969* (Leavenworth Papers No. 19). Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Combat Studies Institute, 1991.

Overshadowed by Vietnam, the significant low-intensity conflict which Korea experienced in the late 1960s, resulting in hundreds of American and South Korean dead and wounded, was given little attention. This book is a reminder of those events, which Daniel Bolger refers to as the Second Korean Conflict.

Bolger discusses successful anti-infiltration tactics developed by the American commander in the field, General Charles H. Bonesteel III, and the successful grassroots defense organization instituted by the South Korean government under President Park Chung Hee. Bonesteel's tactics involved improvements to security