

# The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters

---

Volume 50  
Number 2 *Summer 2020*

Article 15

---

5-15-2020

## Book Reviews

USAWC SSI

Follow this and additional works at: <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters>

---

### Recommended Citation

USAWC SSI, "Book Reviews," *Parameters* 50, no. 2 (2020), doi:10.55540/0031-1723.1026.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by USAWC Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters by an authorized editor of USAWC Press.

# Book Reviews

NATIONAL SECURITY

## The Russia Trap: How Our Shadow War with Russia Could Spiral into Nuclear Catastrophe

By George Beebe

Reviewed by James P. Farwell, associate fellow in the Centre for Strategic Communication, Department of War Studies, Kings College, University of London, and a non-resident senior fellow at the Middle East Institute in Washington

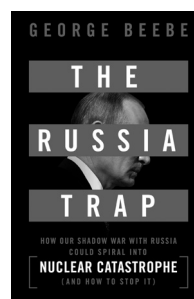
George S. Beebe served as the director of the Central Intelligence Agency's Russia analysis and was Vice President Dick Cheney's adviser on Russia. Savvy and insightful, he contravenes the conventional wisdom calling for increased pressure on Vladimir Putin and the Kremlin for its disruptive activities in US elections, Europe, and other places. In an excellent new book, *The Russia Trap*, he lays out a clear history of modern Russian relations with the West, explaining how tensions escalated after the collapse of the Soviet Union, where we are headed, and the grave risks the current trajectory poses.

He begins with a proposal: The United States and Russia are fighting an undeclared virtual war. It is not a cold war between two ideological adversaries but a shadow war in which the two nations are competing for strategic advantage without direct use of military force. While the United States pioneered the use of soft power, Moscow has learned fast.

The weapons include cybersabotage, cyberespionage, and cyberinfluence. These confluent tactics, he argues, create escalating spirals of aggression and suspicion. In a networked, globalized world in which digital networks, national economies, media systems, and nuclear command and control systems are all linked together in some way, it is difficult to limit damage inflicted from any of these cyber weapons. The potential consequences of these attacks could range from armed hostilities to nuclear war.

Beebe's strength has always been as an analyst and grand strategist. One of his keenest skills lies in his ability to see how the other side thinks and acts. He recognizes America's agenda looks different in the eyes of Moscow. The Russian government "sees 'instability and destabilization' as the defining characteristic of US foreign policy" (27). In this view, Russia is a victim, not a perpetrator, of disruption and the United States has brought disorder, not prosperity.

He traces the history of US-Russia relations over the last three decades, from Kosovo to the Arab Spring—Libya and Syria. As relations have evolved—perhaps more accurately, devolved—the United States and Russia each views itself as engaged in legitimate, defensive, and benign actions, while the other engages in the opposite. These attitudes reinforce one another, deepening mistrust and eliminating important brakes on escalatory spirals.



New York: St. Martin's Press, 2019  
240 pages  
\$28.99

Americans dismiss Russian objections to an eastward expansion of NATO or efforts to foster democracy in Russia. Russia, Beebe argues, feels threatened by NATO and sees activities like the National Endowment for Democracy as fostering sentiment in Russia intended to ignite regime change. Beebe feels the nations are experiencing brake failure. The Cold War was fought over a set of rules that imposed vital restraint. Today's shadow war lacks them. The US withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty has intensified suspicions, and the Kremlin rejects as implausible the explanation that the US focus is Iran, rather than exploiting a perceived Russian vulnerability. Problems with other strategic arms control agreements deepen the challenge.

Russian meddling in the 2016 US election raised emotions to a new high. Washington responded with tough sanctions aimed at squeezing Russia into submission. In Beebe's view, that strategy is doomed and more likely to make the Kremlin more aggressive.

He discusses a scenario that could trigger all-out war, closely tied to a plausible rendering of current events; it is a nightmare scenario. Beebe also offers a series of initiatives to absorb shocks wrought by security tensions. He defines these as surprise developments that diverge suddenly and sharply from the trends preceding them. As examples, he cites the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the 2008 financial crisis, and the Arab Spring. The challenges are not linear. We must recognize this and build resilience into the system to achieve stability.

Solutions Beebe proposes include resilience through more frequent and open personal communication between officials. Critical infrastructure requires technical resilience. Informal understandings such as those following the Cuban missile crisis are vital. He argues we need to look beyond our relations with Russia, incorporating them into mutually beneficial strategies, such as checkmating Chinese expansion.

Beebe knows his subject. He has thought long and hard about the challenges US-Russia tensions pose. He understands the escalatory risks and argues cogently for practical approaches that lower tensions and reduce the risk of accident or strategic miscalculation leading to war. *The Russia Trap* is a must read. It is well written, informing, enlightening, and provides a needed perspective that lights the road ahead to strength and stability.

## On Absolute War: Terrorism and the Logic of Armed Conflict

By Eric Fleury

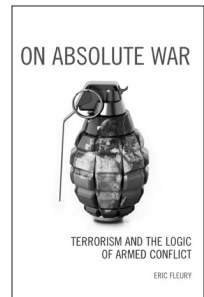
Reviewed by LTC Nathan K. Finney, US Army

Wrestling with the underlying elements of theory—picking it apart and refashioning it to describe the issues we face today—can be a challenge for military members engaged in the day-to-day rigors of a career in the armed forces.

Fortunately, Eric Fleury's *On Absolute War* provides a compelling example of how to think deeply about the underlying logic of military theory and its application to contemporary problems. Initially, based on the title and the table of contents, I was expecting to find terrorism explained with well-known Clausewitz quotes. I could not have been more mistaken. Fleury digs thoroughly into theory—specifically the basic logic of Clausewitz's *On War*, including its purpose and application—and then uses it to fashion his own concept which he then applies to the underlying drivers and dynamics of terrorism as a method of warfare, creating a general theory of terrorism. I was exceedingly skeptical at first but by the end, *On Absolute War* convinced me of the merits of Fleury's approach.

Using the structure of *On War* as a model, *On Absolute War* begins with a dialectical comparison of terrorism and conventional warfare, which includes a more nuanced look at the former through the assessment of terrorism as practiced by both state and nonstate actors. Through case studies he explains the dynamics of terrorism and its inherent goal of perpetual escalation, militarizing all sides to a conflict in a manner that approaches absolute war as described by Clausewitz. Finally, Fleury grafts the Clausewitzian concept of battle onto terrorism demonstrating how a theory of terrorism can describe the relationship between the state and its citizens under this form of warfare.

What is so impressive about *On Absolute War* is its nuance and understated breakthroughs. Fleury undoubtedly understands *On War* better than most, going beyond the surface of Clausewitz's work into what drove the development of his theory and the logic behind it. He recognizes and uses techniques that make *On War* relevant to military art and science to this day. In addition to adopting a dialectic approach, Fleury focuses on key elements of the Clausewitzian theory such as the permanent interplay of human nature and historical evolution. By understanding these elements, Fleury is able to progress beyond simply applying Clausewitzian phrases or surface-level ideas to his own work, and instead engages the underlying theory as it relates to terrorism in order to ascertain something wholly new. In the process, he advances beyond the analysis of the last few decades, which “have precluded a more fundamental examination of how to understand the nature of war between such dissimilar combatants”—terrorist and conventional



Washington, DC: Lexington  
Books, 2019  
177 pages  
\$95.00

forces (2). Fleury determines that we “must reevaluate the nature of the conflict itself, not just revise its tactics” (5).

The most innovative and thought-provoking concept in Fleury’s work is the idea that “terrorism is an attempt to approximate a condition of absolute war in reality as much as possible” that strives to bypass “traditional limits of warfare, especially friction and reciprocity,” to coerce all actors to escalate their actions, and thereby create ever more militarized communities on all sides, ultimately aiming to “reorient . . . loyalties around the architects of the campaign” (5). Contrary to traditional military perspectives on absolute war—that it includes nuclear weapons and threatens the end of humankind—the nuanced and analytical approach Fleury uses to make such a case for terrorism is quite masterful.

Despite its many strengths, *On Absolute War* is not perfect. While Fleury’s overall assessment of the motivations behind the Global War on Terror, and his descriptions of approaches taken in its prosecution are well summarized, he somewhat mischaracterizes the counter- and anti-terrorism policy continuum from the Bush to the Obama administrations. While the former certainly viewed a campaign against terrorism as global, and the commitment as total, the latter fundamentally changed its focus and approach, attempting to back away from and solve challenges created by the former. Small details like these are almost inconsequential, however, given the intellectual innovation and insight gained throughout the rest of the book.

*On Absolute War* is my top recommendation for 2019. *On Absolute War* presents a strong theoretical and intellectual framework for planners, strategists, and decision makers in the national security realm. Thinkers, planners, and strategists—even those not interested in terrorism—stand to gain valuable insight into how to dissect, reformulate, create, and write about military theory. Fleury has provided not only an insightful general theory for terrorism, but guidance on engaging with theory in general.

## MILITARY HISTORY

**The Girls Next Door: Bringing the Home Front to the Front Lines**

By Kara Dixon Vuic

Reviewed by Dr. Jacqueline E. Whitt, associate professor of strategy, US Army War College

Kara Dixon Vuic's second book, *The Girls Next Door: Bringing the Home Front to the Front Lines*, should have been written ages ago, yet it is well-timed to make a meaningful impact on the field today. Both academic and analytical, this serious yet accessible and expertly written book centers on the physical and emotional experiences of the women who volunteered to work in wartime troop support programs and whose service as historical agents and important actors in a broader story might have been marginalized or absent from other accounts.

Vuic captures and preserves the unique voices and stories of these women and presents a straightforward and compelling case for the careful study of people who move in and around military circles in wartime. She offers critical analysis, avoids jargon and theory-laden discursive passages, and makes it clear through her construction and analysis that she is well attuned to more academic concerns.

While war accounts often center on male combat experiences, *The Girls Next Door* focuses on women and their service to the nation during war. The book rounds out the reader's understanding of women's wartime work when accounts of these official recreation and entertainment responsibilities are considered alongside studies of women laboring in wartime industrial jobs and serving in uniform. Vuic connects conceptual ideas about the home front and the battlefield—these women were employed in programs specifically designed to “domesticate the military environment,” and these “recreation programs variously sought to combat prostitution, remind soldiers of their mothers or sweethearts, and symbolize a supportive American home front” (1).

Take a moment to reread the program goals: it is a whiplash-inducing set of expectations for young women to navigate. Their tensions are palpable throughout the book: be wholesome and pretty, but not *too* pretty. Be friendly and available, but not *too* available. Remind them (simultaneously?) of their mother and their sweetheart at home. Make friends but do not become too attached—some of them are going to die. Work, travel abroad, and be independent, but move and live under strict constraints to protect your safety. Boost soldier morale and bear the burden of men's emotions and experiences of war, but do not let your vulnerabilities show.

Vuic expertly walks readers through these complexities, bringing challenges to the forefront and embedding them within her deeper



Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019

392 pages

\$29.95

analysis of social and cultural changes in the United States—especially regarding race, gender roles, and sexuality—that affected both the institutional role of these women and their recreation and entertainment work experiences. She also clearly recognizes that these women, while working within structural and institutional constraints, sometimes changed and subverted the instrumental institutional aims and exercised agency to shape and interpret their experiences.

Vuic moves chronologically through the twentieth century, beginning roughly with the First World War and culminating with an examination of the Persian Gulf War in 1991. The Second World War merits two chapters, one of which examines the unique challenges of race, colonialism, and exoticism in the Pacific and China-Burma-India theaters. In the epilogue, Vuic offers a brief speculative commentary on how women as entertainers and morale/recreation workers factor into twenty-first-century American military engagements.

Vuic's choice to organize each chapter with a different format and thrust, depending on the most relevant analytical categories and sources, is refreshing. The chapters stand well on their own and do not feel forced into an artificial structure, although I did find myself occasionally wishing for a deeper dive on the institutional side: How were women selected, trained, equipped, funded, supervised, and evaluated? How did differences in these patterns affect experiences and expectations?

By the end of the book, one point is crystal clear: women are not peripheral to military history or to the history of war more broadly. Gender and sexuality are central to these fields. Further, historians of women and of gender should also make the careful study of military and wartime contexts central to their work. By focusing on women who were employed in official entertainment and recreation work, Vuic clearly proves military history, the history of war and society, women's history, and the history of gender and sexuality are intertwined. Her spot-on epilogue highlights the challenges arising as women have become fully integrated members of the military profession: "Organizations that held up women as symbols of both wholesome and sexualized ideals placed them in untenable and often dangerous situations. And, recreation and entertainment programs that offered women as antidotes to the military suggested that they had no place in it" (271).

Contemporary military leaders of gender-integrated units who want to understand more clearly how complex ideas about gender roles, sexuality, masculinity, femininity, and domesticity have operated within the military sphere should add *The Girls Next Door* to their reading lists. It is more important than ever for members of the twenty-first-century US armed forces to understand the military's historical pattern of reinforcing binary and traditionally conservative gender roles and create a new organizational culture that welcomes and includes women as full members.



## Maxwell Taylor's Cold War: From Berlin to Vietnam

By Ingo Trauschweizer

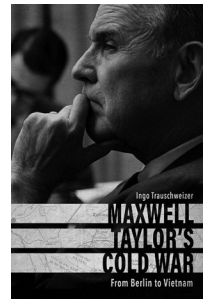
Reviewed by Frank Jones, professor of security studies, US Army War College

Nearly thirty years have passed since Douglas Kinnard published *The Certain Trumpet: Maxwell Taylor and the American Experience in Vietnam*. Kinnard, a retired Army brigadier general and later professor of political science, was no stranger to Taylor. He served on Taylor's personal staff when Taylor was Army chief of staff, and spent hours interviewing him. Now Ingo Trauschweizer, an Ohio University history professor, offers a different portrait of Taylor—one long overdue.

In this well-researched book, Trauschweizer provides a balanced and meticulous appraisal of Taylor's career from 1945 until the general's death in 1987. This perspective advances our understanding of Taylor through the author's adroit use of archives, high-quality secondary sources published since the 1990s and, most notably, declassified information Kinnard did not have access to in the 1980s.

As Trauschweizer highlights in the introduction, Taylor's detractors are legion. They viewed him as a ruthless, mendacious, manipulative micromanager or worse. Yet when he died, obituary writers and politicians lionized him, citing his long service to the nation and brilliant career. He remains an extraordinary example of an American leader in the twentieth century—soldier, presidential adviser, diplomat, business executive, and public intellectual. Trauschweizer brings each of these roles into view with clarity, using speeches, articles, and Taylor's books to flesh out this accomplished officer's strategic thinking and judgment.

These last two points are unmistakable in the chapters on Taylor's stint as West Point superintendent, and, even more impressively, as Commanding General of the Eighth Army in South Korea and Commanding General, US Forces Far East. As superintendent, Taylor brought a different emphasis to the US Military Academy's curriculum, one that contemporary officers, regardless of rank, should heed: the ability to think critically, communicate clearly, and employ military history for leadership development. These strategic leader competencies are visible in Taylor himself. His ability to use popular magazines and elite journals such as *Foreign Affairs* to discuss world events and the Army's missions is an important element of Trauschweizer's intellectual biography. Taylor understood the military instrument of power encompassed more than the use of force. His 1948 Kermit Roosevelt Lecture, delivered two years before NSC-68, is a testament to his prescience and comprehension of the military strategy needed for the Atomic Age. His command of US forces in West Berlin (1949–51), an island in a sea of Soviet power during a period of intense hostility on America's Cold War front lines, was masterful. Trauschweizer underscores how Taylor used the instruments of national power in this assignment and the economic instrument in particular, working with his chief economist to make the Marshall



Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2019

328 pages

\$45.00



Plan a reality, rebuilding war-torn Berlin. Trauschweizer's discussion of Taylor's guiding hand to implement the Korean War armistice and postwar activities buttresses the argument that Taylor was a strategist of high order who understood the criticality of aligning ends, ways, and means.

Equally important, Trauschweizer underscores Taylor's assessment of World War II—it was not simply the attainment of victory. More broadly, Taylor recognized the war as an imperative for mobilizing the American public in support of national interests, policy objectives, and the US military. He grasped that the role of the military leader is to improve relations with civilians, both political leaders and American society, especially in a military dependent on conscription.

Taylor's faith in the indispensable role of the infantryman was never far from his mind as he attempted to organize the Army for the atomic battlefield as chief of staff. The disagreements between President Dwight D. Eisenhower and Taylor resulted from differing strategic visions, but as the author points out neither Eisenhower nor Army Secretary Robert Stevens had Taylor as their first pick for chief. Despite this fraught association, and the friction it created, Taylor's wise stewardship at a time of major transition in strategy, coupled with budget battles with a president determined to cut defense spending and service turf fights, should not be dismissed. Taylor's thinking about deterrence and operations below the nuclear threshold is valuable and relevant, worthy of study by today's strategists.

Yet Taylor is recalled as the Kennedy administration's doyen. His book *The Uncertain Trumpet* transfixed the president—here was a general with new thinking. Taylor's first assignment for JFK was a bureaucratic labor—assessing what went wrong with the Bay of Pigs invasion of Castro's Cuba, a catastrophic failure and political embarrassment. Taylor's advice and the trust he engendered with Kennedy led to his appointment as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1962, a position he held into the Lyndon Johnson presidency. Johnson found Taylor's counsel similarly valuable and made him ambassador to South Vietnam as America's entry into the war was in play.

Like so many among the "Best and Brightest," Taylor's legacy is tainted by Vietnam. He bears responsibility for that fiasco, which he acknowledged publicly years later. Perhaps his optimism about achieving US policy objectives was unrealistic, but he had an affliction common among those who fought in World War II—they had difficulty understanding their North Vietnamese adversary, perhaps out of hubris and cultural insensitivity. Likewise, Taylor's ignorance of the workings of the North Vietnamese Central Committee, vital to assessing strategic risk, was endemic in the US government. But even more fundamental, US leaders could not reframe the environment. Here Taylor's critical thinking skills, the unerring judgment Eisenhower lauded him for in *Crusade in Europe*, failed him abysmally.

Kinnard ends his book by contending Taylor is a transitional figure, the link between “heroic generals” of World War II and “managerial generals” of the postwar period. Trauschweizer’s book presents sufficient evidence to suggest a third group. Taylor was ahead of his time, a forerunner of a new school, the politico-military general, fulfilled in such figures as Lieutenant General Brent Scowcroft and General Colin Powell—generals endowed with the expertise and aptitude to move proficiently between the civilian and military realms as presidential agents and policy entrepreneurs. This conclusion may be Trauschweizer’s most significant contribution to the study of civil-military relations in the post-Goldwater-Nichols era.

## My Lai: Vietnam, 1968, and the Descent into Darkness

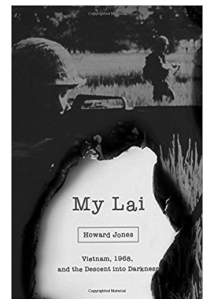
By Howard Jones

Reviewed by Dr. Ron Milam, executive director, Institute for Peace & Conflict, Texas Tech University

Many books have been written about the My Lai Massacre during the Vietnam War—most notably Michael Bilton and Keven Sims’ *Four Hours in My Lai* (1992). The latest and most complete book, and certainly the most thoroughly documented of the very tragic story, is Howard Jones’ *My Lai: Vietnam, 1968, and the Descent into Darkness*. Jones’s book illuminates new issues associated with the tragedy that occurred on March 16, 1968, in the village of Sơn Mỹ in Quang Ngãi Province, Republic of Vietnam. Telling this story is difficult for authors, and Professor Jones has done it well.

To summarize the military operation that took place that day, soldiers from Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 20th Infantry Regiment of the 11th Brigade of the 23rd Infantry Division—known as the Americal Division—were *ordered* to enter several hamlets and *eliminate, destroy, kill*, or any one of several verbs soldiers understood to mean destroying everything that lived in the village. An artillery barrage would precede the operation since it was supposedly market day, and the soldiers were told there would be no noncombatants in the area, and anyone there would be either Viet Cong (VC) or VC sympathizers. The 48th National Liberation Front battalion was known to be operating in the area, and while soldiers differed in subsequent interviews as to what they were ordered to do, there was unanimity in the understanding that all persons and livestock were to be destroyed, and that they would probably receive resistance from the VC in the area. They encountered none. After four hours, over 500 elderly men, women, and children lay dead.

Jones documents not only the actions of March 16, 1968, but also how Charlie Company engaged the enemy in previous weeks without ever seeing them. In particular, members of 1st Platoon knew VC soldiers had skinned alive an American soldier, and many members



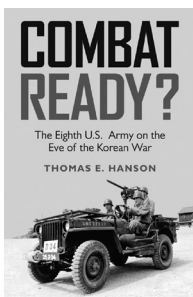
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017  
504 pages  
\$34.95

of the platoon had heard the soldier's agonizing cries throughout the night. Lieutenant William Calley of 1st Platoon had reportedly noted his men's response was, "you had to kill" (29). The extent to which revenge was the motivating factor is part of the mystery associated with the My Lai massacre.

Jones examined the depositions of many soldiers involved in the operation and writes of rampant sexual assault and the horrific murder of women and children. His words create a difficult narrative to read, especially for combat veterans of any war. Perhaps the most revolting picture of the more than forty-two presented in the book is one captioned "Lunch break a few feet from a pile of bodies." The picture shows no apparent security cordon, just five soldiers relaxing after killing hundreds of noncombatants.

Jones discusses the heroes of My Lai, particularly helicopter pilot Warrant Officer Hugh Thompson and door gunner Specialist Lawrence Colburn who confronted Calley and threatened to shoot American soldiers if the killing did not stop. These men provided the most details of the massacre prior to the formal investigation. The Army cover-up and lengthy trials are major parts of the book, with the author providing a very balanced look at the way the evidence linked the failures of leadership to those connected, including Calley, and those acquitted, including Captain Ernest Medina.

*My Lai* is the most complete and well-documented published account of the massacre, one highly applicable to military leaders who may be confronted with decisions about ordering men and women into combat situations or in handling such information after war crimes are alleged. *My Lai* should be read by active duty military personnel who may have to engage enemy soldiers and make decisions about who are noncombatants—at My Lai every person the soldiers encountered was a noncombatant. Jones has done a great service to the field of military history and Vietnam War scholarship with this very fine book.



College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2010  
158 pages  
\$45.00

## Combat Ready? The Eighth U.S. Army on the Eve of the Korean War

By Thomas E. Hanson

Reviewed by Dr. Russell W. Glenn, director, Plans and Policy, G2, US Army Training and Doctrine Command

In this history of the training of select US Army units in Japan on the eve of the Korean War, author Thomas Hanson challenges a widely embraced assessment of US Army units deployed in the immediate aftermath of North Korea's invasion of South Korea: their failure to defeat those forces was attributable to occupation soldiers' soft living. Hanson effectively argues that such was not the case, at least not for the quartet of infantry regiments that are his focus. The first three chapters are the most valuable—indispensable context and a synthesis of what is

to follow. Four central chapters, each covering a regiment representing one of four infantry divisions in Eighth Army at the time, are impressive in depth and detail. The conclusion reinforces points previously made and offers several innovative and interesting thoughts on what might have been, despite the author allowing himself a bit of subjectivity that unfortunately detracts somewhat from the whole of his offering.

Hanson convincingly counters the allegation of “soft soldiers” by demonstrating that commanders worked hard to train their units in the months prior to the June 1950 incursion. He frequently cites—and substantiates—factors impeding their efforts: undermanning, personnel turnover, frequent commander rotation, lack of noncommissioned officers, deficient equipment, and ineffective training areas. Division strengths were limited to 12,500 of 18,900 authorized for financial reasons. Infantry regiments were short one battalion of three authorized, and their artillery battalions were likewise deficient in one of three batteries.

Army units in Japan remained an occupying force until early spring of 1949, then transitioned to a defense of Japan mission, the primary threat being the Soviet Union lurking not too distantly to the north of Hokkaido. The mission should have been fair preparation for repelling a North Korean attack a little over a year later, but volatility in the ranks meant any training done other than at the individual level had a short half-life. Attempts at collective training, by necessity, had to await individual preparation as seventeen weeks of pre-deployment basic training during World War II had been cut by more than half to eight weeks by the late 1940s. And some soldiers arrived with less. Little wonder that Eighth Army established its own basic training programs while subordinate units were responsible for instilling branch-specific skills as, Hanson relates, none of the latter training was provided stateside prior to a new soldier’s arrival in Japan. It was a shortcoming redressed only in July 1950, the month following North Korea’s invasion.

Hanson is particularly critical of post-World War II officer assignment policies in which leaders were assigned to command positions with little if any attention given to previous experience. He condemns “the assignment of patently unqualified officers to maneuver unit command billets for their retirement tours . . . as one of the most damaging policies implemented by the U.S. Army between 1945 and 1950” (37). The judgment may have value, but limiting his observation to maneuver commands alone—a constraint that generally characterizes the book as a whole—undervalues branch and combined arms expertise so fundamental to the success of the US Army in World War II.

Recent veterans of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan will find some of Hanson’s insights all too familiar. Relying on civilians for vehicle maintenance in Japan due to manpower shortages meant those skills were later lacking on the Korean peninsula, particularly given the 24/7 requirements of combat. Those involved in more recent conflicts in the Middle East and Central Asia likely felt a similar sting when contractors

who provided maintenance for key systems could not or would not deploy forward. Veterans whose careers include Vietnam will likewise shake their heads at Hanson's observation that "punching command tickets" was behind the overly rapid turnover among battalion and regimental leaders. The 31st Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division had three commanders within eleven months when a new colonel assumed command in the opening days of February 1950. Hanson regrettably again allows objectivity to slip here, concluding—without citing a justification—that "The assignment of non-infantry officers to command infantry battalions . . . can only be described as the exacting of revenge by bureaucratic agents uncomfortable with their own contributions to national defense during World War II" (113).

Hanson's work would have benefited from more strategic context. Hanson does take "Lightning Joe" Collins and General Omar Bradley to task for not demanding more in the way of support from the administration and Congress. But he underestimates the impact of ongoing fiscal wrestling among DoD Joint Chiefs facing a never-before-seen era of atomic weapons.

Ultimately, this analysis of how four infantry regiments struggled to overcome severe handicaps to prepare themselves for war provides insights otherwise unavailable in other histories. Hanson's point, that despite very significant initial setbacks these units were fundamental to slowing and eventually halting the North Korean advance is well taken. The first units to cross the Sea of Japan fought and failed to stop South Korea's invaders in the war's opening weeks. Yet in the weeks to follow, these units would be part of the tide that washed northward once again to regain the territory lost, and then some. This book puts the challenges faced by these men in context showing that the months leading up to those initial setbacks included tough training and too little support from the command structure. Hanson's work does much to set the record straight in terms of the real reason those opening weeks progressed as they did, while reminding US political and senior military leaders how decisions made in illusionary periods of peace come home to roost when the illusion dissipates.