

Company Commander Writes Book on Korean Conflict



READ PRAYERS—Exhausted Marines snatch a moment's rest behind wall in streets of Seoul, and Army Chaplain Capt. A. M. Knier of Kiel, Wis., reads final prayers over

bodies of some 36 American soldiers whose hands were tied behind their backs and then shot to death. (UPI)

(Editor's note - In June, 1950, a contingent of American soldiers air-hopped into Korea to defend the Republic in the South from Communist invaders from the North. American intervention, it was hoped, would end the conflict quickly. But Communist China also intervened and the small-scale "police action" blossomed into a three-year war that cost 33,000 American battle deaths. Now, with the perspective of 10 years, Korea can be regarded as the forerunner of an era of "brushfire wars.")

By **GERALD S. SNYDER**
United Press International

Through a sweeping monsoon rain 13 years ago, a group of American infantrymen newly arrived in Korea watched as a long, black column of Communist tanks rumbled toward them. After seven hours of hell, the first battle involving American troops in Korea was over. Nearly 150 U.S. soldiers were dead and the North Korean Peoples Army was rolling unhindered to the South. The "police action" Americans hoped to stop with a quick show of strength was destined to continue for three bloody, frustrating years before ending without a clear-cut decision.

Why did America get involved? What lessons have been learned from that inglorious conflict? Why was the Korean War — never declared and never "won" — one of the most controversial and frustrating in American history?

T. R. Fehrenbach was a platoon leader, company commander and battalion staff officer with the U.S. 2nd Infantry division in Korea. Now, in the 10th year since the cease-fire, the San Antonio author has written the most comprehensive report of the Korean War to date.

His big (689 pages) opus examines the limited, bloody conflict on the level of the frontline soldier and from the perspective of military and political grand strategy. The dialogue throughout is frank in the context of the total international situation, including the possibility of a Soviet countermove in Europe. The book, "This Kind of War" (MacMillan) is aptly subtitled "A Study in Unpreparedness."

"People today still do not understand the war," Fehrenbach said in an interview. Americans, he said, sprung from generations conditioned to avoid political war. But they responded with unlimited fury, stopping not short of total victory, when pushed to the limit of tolerability by a Kaiser or a Hitler. These were wars of morality, crusades against evil . . . the wars of 1917 and 1941.

Korea was a war different from any other in our history, except possibly the Indian campaigns of the Old West, he said. It was a war of containment in which the United States, under the United Nations banner, acted to turn back the aggression without trying to stamp out its source. To have used all its power, the U.S. fleet might have prompted global war, possibly involving the whole of Red China and the Soviet Union.

The Korean war was a war with a limited objective in line with the U.S. foreign policy of containing Communism, he said.

"To take no action against the Communists would have meant suffering an extreme political defeat. But we wanted to prevent a third world war," Fehrenbach said.

"So the United States decided to play the enemy at his own chess game . . . to check his gambit. Millions of Americans say you don't play this way," he said. "That we should have turned over the table and gone for broke."

The U.S. decided to play the game and the stakes were high. Korean combat maimed and killed thousands of men on each side and made household words out of Mig Alley, Heartbreak Ridge and Pork Chop Hill. It spurred conscience-searching questions of prison conduct and "brainwashing," and dissolved into near-endless Panmunjon peace talks that finally made permanent the stalemate at the 38th parallel. Korea, costly and inglorious, has become "the most forgotten war in American history," Fehrenbach said.

Don't Look
Because Americans cannot look back on all of this with any sense of satisfaction, Fehrenbach believes, they prefer not to look back at all. "Not until long after the battle was over was it even dignified by the name of war; it was the 'Korean conflict,'" he said. "There was little in it, from near-disastrous beginning to honorable but frustrating end, that appealed to American sensibilities."

Yet Korea was the beginning of an age of "brushfire" wars, he said. "The end of the war did not mark the end of an era but merely marked a fork in the road the world is still travelling." Viet Nam and Cuba are other "forks," he said.

Korea taught Americans that ill-trained and poorly disciplined troops will come apart under pressure. In 1950, he asserted, the American people were psychologically unprepared for war, especially war on the ground. They had heard a lot about atomic weapons and subconsciously regarded infantry warfare as obsolete.

New Break
"Some people were saying we really didn't need an army," Fehrenbach said. "And the troops were a new breed who had insisted, with some public support, that the army be made as much like civilian life and home as possible."

"They were like American youth everywhere," he said. "They believed the things their society had taught them to believe. They were cool, and confident, and figured that the world was no sweat. It was not their fault that no one had told them that the real function of any army is to fight and that a soldier's destiny — which few escape — is to suffer, and if need be, to die."

Fehrenbach, 38, now a lieutenant colonel in the Army Reserve, believes that today's professional Army is better

prepared — in terms of equipment but especially in attitude and discipline.

His narration tells the story of the prison camps, the riots by Communist POWs interned at Kojedo, the Inchon landings, Truman's dismissal of MacArthur, and the peace talk stalemate the Reds used to build up their amage. ("As long as China could hold a UN Army at bay, she stood to gain enormous prestige in Asia," Fehrenbach said.)

The author explains the confusion at home: "It (the U.S.) had massive forces in the field, killing, being killed, but life went on much as before. Men were being called from factory and field, but there was still 'peace.' There was war, obviously, but still there was not war as Americans had come to understand it."

In retrospect, Fehrenbach believes the biggest shortcoming of the national administration was its failure to explain to the public the nature of the war in Korea and why we had chosen to fight it as we did. This failure, he concluded, resulted in a confused, angry nation which at times questioned the wisdom, even the patriotism and integrity, of its leaders.

Troops Not Told
And no one told the troops why they were summoned to fight and die as the truce talks dragged on for months. "Hoping for the war to end at any moment, they kept one eye on Kaeson or on Pan-

munjon (the peace talk sites). When they were ordered to defend a hill or to take one, they knew the action was a limited one, and they knew in their heart, whatever brave words were said, that such action probably would not affect the outcome of the war at all."

Fehrenbach said the war proved the need for a highly trained professional army ready to fight in limited wars without asking "Why." But he concludes: "Men are not ciphers, and human hearts are not potatoes, and if a nation is going to send men out to die in limited wars, it had better first condition them for it. 'The man who will go where his colors go, without

asking, who will fight a phantom foe in jungle and mountain range, without counting, and who will suffer and die

in the midst of incredible hardship, without complaint, is still what he has always been, from Imperial Rome to

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