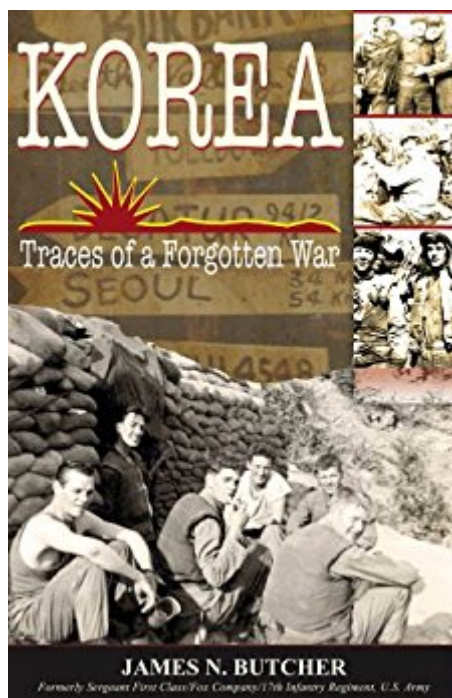


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Korea: Traces Of A Forgotten War



Synopsis

The Korean War is often referred to as the forgotten war. In his book, professor James N. Butcher relives his experiences as an infantryman with Fox Company of the 17th Infantry Regiment, during the final year of the Korean War (1952-1953). In a graphic portrayal of living conditions on the front, Butcher describes combat actions that occurred in two major battles of this period: the Battle for Jane Russell Hill (a part of Triangle Ridge) and the first Battle of Pork Chop Hill and makes a strong case for why we as Americans need to remember what happened there and why.

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Customer Reviews

This is not a history book about the Korean War; instead, it is an infantryman's description of life serving on the front lines during that war. The author was a volunteer, not a draftee, as he saw the US Army as a means for escaping a continuing life of poverty in West Virginia. (The author's dad died when he was eight and his mom died when he was eleven, so he was raised by older siblings.) Many of the dramatic events of the Korean War (North Korean troops pushing all the way down to the Pusan Perimeter, MacArthur's Inchon Landing, the US push up to the Yalu River and

subsequent retreat upon China's entry into the war) had already occurred by the time the author arrived in Korea. So when the author arrived in Korea, the battle lines had become relatively stable, but that stability could only be maintained through intermittent attacks and counter-attacks (including two battles for Pork Chop Hill) and innumerable combat patrols. Like other books that describe war from a personal perspective, the book talks about the waste of humanity (and especially the deaths of so many close friends). But in this case, there was the added frustration of knowing that politicians were using military men as pawns while, the whole time, peace talks dragged on and on. The author's decades-later reflections upon this "forgotten" war (and its long term impact on Korea itself) were also interesting.

I once had a friend named Allison "Al" Worley, a retired US Marine. He fought in Korea and survived the battle of Chosin Reservoir, becoming one of the "Chosin Few" who survived that hellish battle. Before his 1969 retirement from the Marine Corps, Al also served in Vietnam. We talked about Korea, but Al was quite reticent when discussing details of his experiences. After his death, the Marine Corps League named a Detachment after him. Mr Butcher's book provides me with many details that my friend Al could not bring himself to discuss. This book chronicles the battles the author fought as an Army Infantryman - not just against the enemies, but also against the incredibly bitter Korean winter weather. It is also the story of Mr. Butcher's personal life - his rise from the poverty-stricken youth that he and his siblings survived while raising themselves after both parents had died. Mr. Butcher, who was a Sergeant First Class before he turned 20 years of age, served 3 years in the Army - almost a year of that time in Korea. He goes into detail about the people he served with, recalling names and details about them long after the war ended. James Butcher is an accomplished author, with 58 books and more than 250 articles to his credit. After his discharge from the Army, he attended College in North Carolina and was awarded a BA in Psychology in 1960, a MA in 1962, and a Ph.D. in clinical Psychology in 1964. He tells an incredibly interesting story, well worth the reader's time. I highly recommend this book; I plan to read it again shortly.

I thought this was a very good description of what the latter stages of the Korean War were like. Because the fighting along the MLR was a very different proposition than the early stages of the war where there was so much back and forth. Butcher paints very good word pictures. I had the pleasure of meeting Dr Butcher some years ago (Long before he ever wrote this book) and found him to be an engaging, interesting man. I met him in the course of my academic studies at the University of Minnesota. Butcher's account is stark and realistic and without window dressing. It

matches most of the accounts I have read or have heard from veterans who were there. Most accounts of war end with the authors personal recollections. Butcher does not stop there but goes into many of the whys of the war and the political aspects of it. But, and this is important, he never forgets that the main objective of the guy in the front line is to stay alive, not worry about what the politicians are doing. That is why this book is so good. He has a sense of perspective that is not often found. A very good book and I would recommend it to anyone, not just people who read military history.

Butcher was born to a West Virginia coal miner father who died when the author was eight, and a mother who died shortly before the close of WWII, when he was eleven, leaving him and his two younger brothers to be substantially raised by his 15 year-old sister. Korea: Traces of a Forgotten War, is not only a record of military service, but also one of the development of a good and talented man who entered the army as much to serve his remaining family as his country. He provides the reader with an amazing array of lenses to view both the war, in its military, political, strategic, tactical, and interpersonal aspects, but also in its features of stark realism of mud, fatigue, error, irony, miscalculation, death, and loss. Happily, it is full of wonderful, engaging stories. A plodding war need not engender a plodding memoir! And, along the way, a man grows to find a sense of orientation for the life to come as the war ends. It is that kind of story, too.

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