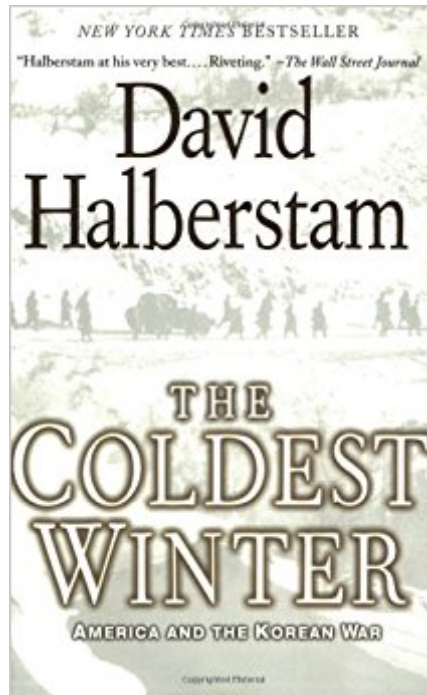


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# The Coldest Winter: America And The Korean War



## Synopsis

"In a grand gesture of reclamation and remembrance, Mr. Halberstam has brought the war back home."--The New York Times David Halberstam's magisterial and thrilling *The Best and the Brightest* was the defining book about the Vietnam conflict. More than three decades later, Halberstam used his unrivaled research and formidable journalistic skills to shed light on another pivotal moment in our history: the Korean War. Halberstam considered *The Coldest Winter* his most accomplished work, the culmination of forty-five years of writing about America's postwar foreign policy. Halberstam gives us a masterful narrative of the political decisions and miscalculations on both sides. He charts the disastrous path that led to the massive entry of Chinese forces near the Yalu River and that caught Douglas MacArthur and his soldiers by surprise. He provides astonishingly vivid and nuanced portraits of all the major figures-Eisenhower, Truman, Acheson, Kim, and Mao, and Generals MacArthur, Almond, and Ridgway. At the same time, Halberstam provides us with his trademark highly evocative narrative journalism, chronicling the crucial battles with reportage of the highest order. As ever, Halberstam was concerned with the extraordinary courage and resolve of people asked to bear an extraordinary burden. *The Coldest Winter* is contemporary history in its most literary and luminescent form, providing crucial perspective on every war America has been involved in since. It is a book that Halberstam first decided to write more than thirty years ago and that took him nearly ten years to complete. It stands as a lasting testament to one of the greatest journalists and historians of our time, and to the fighting men whose heroism it chronicles.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Having served two tours in the infantry in Korea during the War, and being a Korean War buff, I have a different view of the book than most of the reviewers. Unfortunately, the reviewers think that this book is about the Korean War. In part that is true but the real theme of the book is about how General Douglas MacArthur screwed it up. The book is not a complete history of the Korean War as some reviewers have touted. It is anything but that. The book centers on the time period during which Gen. MacArthur was in command, both pre-war and until Pres. Truman relieved him of command. What little remains is more of an epilog very briefly describing the aftermath. That is why the book title is "The Coldest Winter" because it focuses on the disastrous defeat of the UN troops during the winter of 1950 as the result of MacArthur's bungling. Because the book was billed as the most comprehensive history of the Korean War, I was lulled into reading it, only to be sorely disappointed. The first eight months of the War have been extensively covered in books and documentaries with the remaining 2 1/2 years given only cursory exposure, even though several major battles were fought during that period, so Halberstam doesn't expose any new ground. He just regurgitates material already written although he does it in an interesting fashion. What I had hoped to read about was a thorough rendition of the history following MacArthur and the political decisions that colored the War and that was not there in the book for me. Not that I am not aware of them but a lot happened that is not generally known about and I hoped that Halberstam, with his reputation, would expose that material so that it become common knowledge to those studying or even interested in the War.

"The Coldest Winter," David Halberstam's final journalistic tribute to heroes, is a fitting tribute to the men of the oft forgotten war. Halberstam's lengthy career in journalism and as an author shows in his brilliant writing style that keeps you engrossed in every word. It is not surprising that someone who has written so much about Vietnam, would have a huge resource to draw upon in a work about the Korean War. The Coldest Winter is a story that needed telling, much the way Herodotus told of the men of Thermopylae or, more recently how Stephen Ambrose told of the men of Easy Company in "Band of Brothers." Halberstam understood well how most Americans ignore the events and outcome of the Korean Conflict; often, that part of history seems better left untold. The Coldest Winter tells this story and it's back stories and even it's substantial post-script. We mustn't forget that South Korea's success today owes a debt to the American and U.N. forces who fought there over half a century ago. What Halberstam also does in this book is point out the miserable failings of Generals like MacArthur, long-time sacred cows of the World Wars, whose hubris in later life

jeopardized the legacy of any truly heroic deeds of their early careers. General Ned Almond is also lambasted for his stubbornness and poor leadership style, which Halberstam shows led to unnecessary losses of American and U.N. forces. While "Coldest Winter" is by no means concise as far as a historiography goes, Halberstam has revealed the machinations that led to the war and the egos that sustained it. This is not a blow-by-blow, battlefield-to-battlefield account of the Korean War, much of the latter part of the war is overlooked.

The Coldest Winter: America and the Korean War by David Halberstam will stand the test to time just as all of his other works have. It is sad that Mr. Halberstam died last April in an automobile accident while working on his next book. This fact makes reading his last book doubly important, and a little difficult. This is the last trip to the water fountain. The Coldest Winter is well written. While lengthy, there is no fat. Cut a few facts here or there and you've changed the value of the work and not for the better. With books like this I sometimes jump around from chapter to chapter taking the topics in an order that is important to me. I wasn't able to do that with the Coldest Winter. There are a few surprises in the book. I thought that MacArthur was treated pretty fairly by Halberstam. MacArthur is not the perfect leader that he has been portrayed as in much of the media. In fact, at this stage of his career he is beginning to exhibit signs of feebleness brought on by the shaking hands and loss of hearing. That MacArthur underestimated the Communist Koreans is a fact of history but not often discussed. I was also taken by the amount of confusion in the Truman administration during the first few days after the North crossed the border. Very eye opening. I also highly valued the discussions of both Korean leaders, Syngman Rhee in the south and Kim Il Sung in the north. Halberstam's treatment of these two leaders along with his wonderfully concise but accurate history of both the Koreas not only adds to the value of this book, but puts into perspective much of the recent difficulty with North Korea and their obsession with nuclear weapons. Halberstam has always written masterfully constructed books.

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