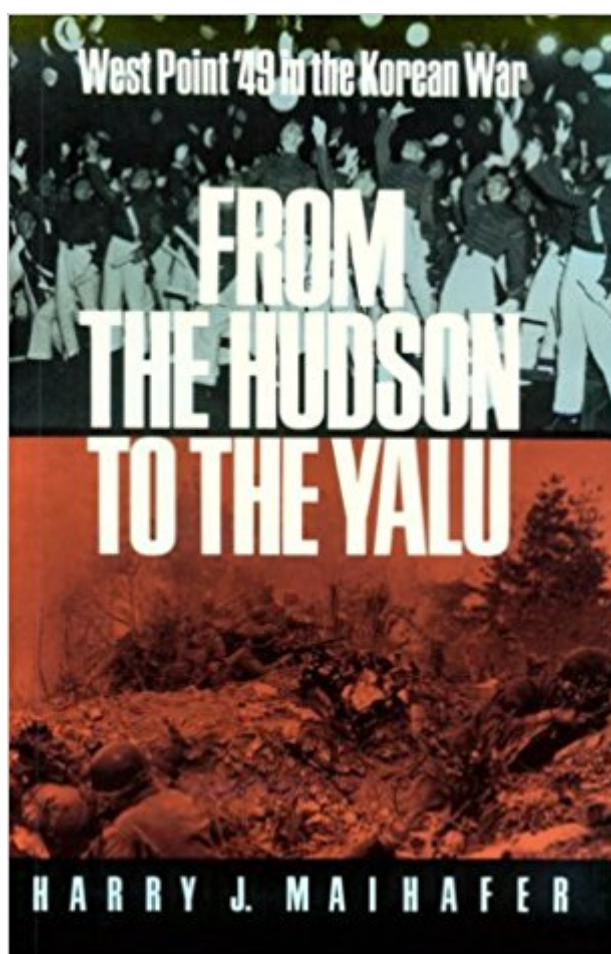


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From The Hudson To The Yalu: West Point '49 In The Korean War (Williams-Ford Texas A&M University Military History Series)



Synopsis

They entered West Point shortly before the end of World War II. Four years later the class of USMA ‘49 graduated amid peacetime military cutbacks and national complacency. A year later these young officers were plunged into a cruel and unexpected war and were forced to compensate, by valor and leadership, for the nation's unpreparedness. Some called it a U.N. Police Action, but to the 2nd lieutenants fighting as platoon leaders, forward observers, and jet pilots, it was war to the fullest. Men of ‘49 served along the Naktong Perimeter, landed at Inchon, flew combat missions against Chinese MiG's, and fought the war of maneuver, and of stalemate, from Pusan to the Yalu. They fought well—some to their death. These are their individual stories, based on the ‘49ers' own firsthand accounts, of what it was like to enter combat, as one said “green as grass, and suddenly face life-and-death responsibility for American troops entrusted to their care. It is the story of men such as Sam Coursen, awarded the Medal of Honor for rescuing a wounded comrade at the cost of his own life; of Ranger hero Ralph Puckett, fighting off the initial Chinese onslaught; of D. D. Overton, becoming an ace as he scores his fifth aerial victory; or of Herb Marshburn, dying heroically as he leads men trying to escape a Chinese trap. The author, who went to Korea as an armored officer but wound up leading an infantry platoon, uses his own story as a narrative framework for this chronicle of the Korean War years. He brings the big picture to life by means of vivid stories of that “forgotten war, told by men who knew it face-to-face at the junior officer level.

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Customer Reviews

The author, a member of the West Point class of '49, has written an absorbing memoir of his service the following year in Korea as a platoon leader with the 24th Division and later as an aide to the division's commanding general. Maihafer was on the scene during the most perilous period of the conflict: the defense of the Pusan Perimeter, the push north after the Inchon landing and the Eighth Army's retreat after the Chinese Communists entered the war. He sets his memoirs within the overall tactical dynamics of the 1950-1953 conflict and, as openings present themselves, relates the combat experiences of his West Point classmates throughout the war. This includes the brief, spectacular, tragic combat career of Lt. William Douglas Bush Jr., an F-86 pilot who, as a lark, asked for and received permission to make a parachute jump with the 187th Regimental Combat Team during his annual 30-day leave, and served as one of its forward air controllers until he was killed by mortar fire. Maihafer's running descriptions of action at the platoon level, combined with his comments on small-unit leadership in battle, make this one of the most memorable books to come out of the Korean War. Photos. Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc.

“As an historian of West Point, I found it deeply moving. It is an important contribution to the historical record of West Pointers in American history, as well as to the history of the military academy. This is one of those rare books about a war by a thoughtful soldier who was there and has the literary ability to bring the experience alive in all its complexity. The boredom, the confusion, the heroism, the pathos of the Korean War live in these pages. No aficionado of military history should miss this book.”—Thomas Fleming, author of *West Point: The Men and Times of the U.S. Military Academy*, *The Officers' Wives*, and *My Country Tis of Thee* (HarperCollins, due out in spring 1994) (Thomas Fleming, author of *West Point: The Men and Times of the*)

Excellent history of Korean War in first year. Also quite a personal narrative involving classmates, their heroism and sacrifice and their incredible sense of duty, honor and country imbued by West Point.

The book's title kind of sums it up. These new Army officers were hastily thrown into the conflict. In the case of the author, a trained tank leader, is put in charge of a ground force platoon. It is an interesting account of the early days of the Korean conflict. Well told by a member of that West Point class of '49.

This book is about the experiences in the Korean War of members of the West Point class of 1949. Just one year after graduation these young officers found themselves in the middle of fierce fighting in rugged Korean terrain. The onset of winter and the entry of the Chinese into the war soon added two new parameters of hazard and difficulty. The author was himself an infantry officer during the fighting and has fashioned the book from his own experiences and those of his classmates. This is how it was. The earlier review by the cyclist has a number of shortcomings. I will address three of the most notable. The quotations below are from that review. "... it behooves them ["a West Pointer/Officer type"] to remain a certain distance from the reality of War." If the reviewer actually read the book, he must realize that the heroes of the book are West Pointers who maintained a zero distance from "the reality of War": they engaged the enemy directly, face to face, in some cases with only bare bayonets when ammunition ran low. "... makes it sound like Korea was some sort of post graduation ritual." Indeed, it was exactly that, the kind of ritual for which West Point prepares its graduates: service to the nation, unto death if necessary. In the Korean War, 30 West Pointers from the class of 1949 gave their lives, and many more were wounded: a grim ritual indeed. "I am tempted to ask if Mr. Maihafer was in the same Korean War I have read about elsewhere." There we have it: the reviewer has read about the Korean War, whereas Col. Maihafer saw it up close, close enough to earn a Silver Star (for valor), a Bronze Star Medal for Valor, and a Purple Heart, which the reviewer's reading may have informed him means that Col. Maihafer was wounded in action. Whose view of the war is likely to be more valid, that of the cyclist or that of the soldier who was there? It is unfortunate that Col. Maihafer was not able to present the war in a way that pleased the cyclist. However, I believe the book will be rewarding to anyone who wants to see the war as it was experienced by these young officers, as they grew from greenhorns to hardened veterans.

One evening in 1948 or early 1949, General Alfred M. Gruenther gave a no-notes talk to the members of West Point's class of 1949 in one of the Military Academy's lecture halls. "You may think you've just wasted four years," I recall him saying, "that you're graduating into an army that the country no longer needs. If so, you are wrong. Every class that has ever graduated from West Point has had to fight in at least one war. Your class will not be an exception." Within only two years, certainly three, General Gruenther's statement had been validated by the outbreak of a bitter war in a place few Americans had ever heard of and by the participation of a great many members of West Point's class of 1949. Entering combat we were still second lieutenants -- infantry platoon leaders, artillery forward observers, co-pilots -- well aware that it wasn't IF we were going to get hit, it was

WHEN and HOW BAD. Most Maihafer answers that question in FROM THE HUDSON TO THE YALU. He is uniquely qualified to tell the stories of what his classmates did because he was in the thick of the war's hottest campaigns himself. Accordingly, Maihafer's prose is lean, his facts authentic, his achievement the recording of what it was like to fight in a war our countrymen were forgetting even before the fighting stopped. It is highly appropriate that FROM THE HUDSON TO THE YALU is still available for those who will observe the 50th Anniversary of Communist North Korea's invasion of South Korea. Even so, this is a book for all occasions. Curt Anders

This is a good book but Donald Knox's books are far better. If you want to read about Adrian Brian's 'I' company adventures, why not read about them firsthand? Compared with Knox's books, Maihafer's third hand accounts are stale and clinical. This is not to say the book is bad is not an enjoyable read, just that it is more like a silent movie, compared to Knox's virtual reality style. To be honest, I expected this from a West Pointer/Officer type, as it behooves them to remain a certain distance from the reality of War. My only encounter with West Pointers was years ago, when I stayed at the Hotel Thayer for an intercollegiate debate tournament being held on the---campus? base? I never knew what to call it. Now, if you have ever read the Gormenghast Trilogy about that ponderous, gothic, byzantine castle, I assure you, the Hotel Thayer is a fairly good representation. The whole place was haunted with tradition--'presidents have slept here, Gary!' my debate coach intoned. Such characteristics may mold great military leaders, but they do not mold great writers. Two flaws mar this book. First, Maihafers' constant reference to the fate of Class of '49 buddies makes it sound like Korea was some sort of post graduation ritual. I am sure the author doesn't mean to characterize Korea as some sort of fraternity right-of-passage, for it was a painful and frequently fatal one; but that's the impression I get from the text. Second, I am tempted to ask if Mr. Maihafer was in the same Korean War I have read about elsewhere. Little is said about the poor performance of Army units in the wars' early weeks. The collapse of discipline and chain of command in the rout at Chosin is given short shrift as well. Here was an excellent chance for Army brass to either set the record straight, or admit to its deficiencies. Maihofers book does neither.

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