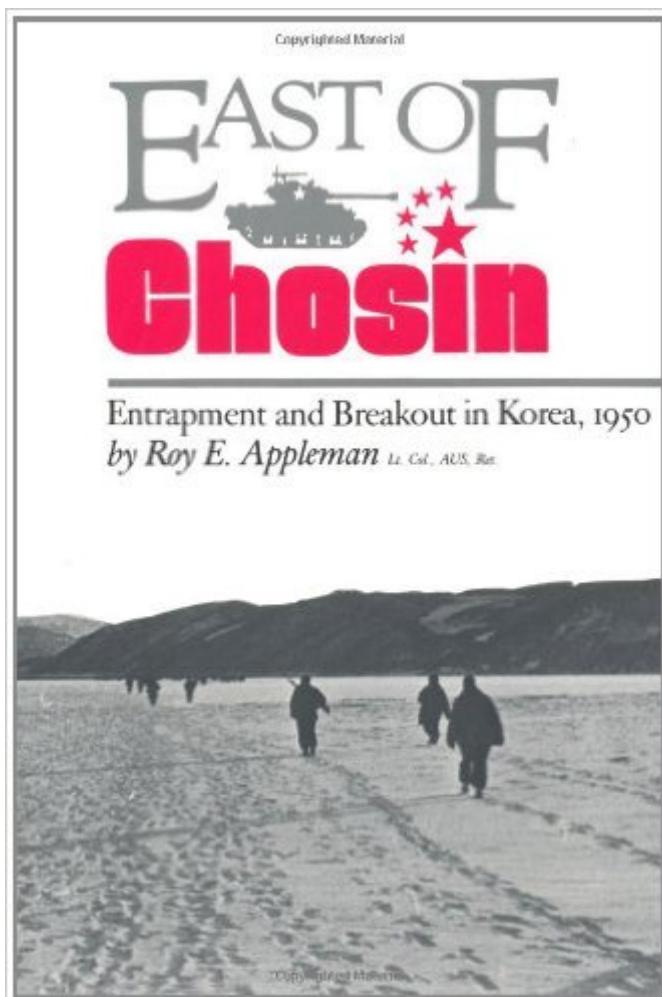


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East Of Chosin: Entrapment And Breakout In Korea, 1950

(Williams-Ford Texas A&M University Military History Series)



Synopsis

In November, 1950, with the highly successful Inchon Landing behind him, Gen. Douglas MacArthur planned the last major offensive of what was to be a brief "conflict": the drive that would push the North Koreans across the Yalu River into Manchuria. In northern Korea, US forces assembled at Chosin Reservoir to cut behind the North Korean forces blocking the planned march to Manchuria. Roy E. Appleman, noted historian of the Korean conflict, describes the tragic fate of the troops of the 31st Regimental Combat Team which fought this engagement and presents a thorough analysis of the physical conditions, attitudes, and command decisions that doomed them.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a book for Korean War hardcores, focusing exclusively on the command, tactical and other decisions which led directly to the disaster of Task Force Faith east of the Chosin reservoir in early December 1950. As such it is extremely detailed in its discussion of terrain, platoon layout and attacks by forces on both sides, communication blunders, and so on. (Keep in mind the whole tragedy unfolded over just 4 days.) There are many maps in the book; even so, I was tempted at times to lay out a topographic map of my own and stick pins in it to represent crucial encounters the author refers to. Unless you can follow and appreciate this level of detail (and have a morbid need to understand the tragedy of the 31st RCT at its fullest) this book is probably going to bore you to death or you will just sail along with the text and not really get a FEEL for the battle. Problems with Army troop training and command are discussed by many authors and occurred in numerous spots

during the first part of the war, until Ridgway whipped the forces into shape and back into fighting mood. Appleman mentions them here, since there were a lot of problems with troop discipline as the breakout proceeded. But he does not make it a big issue, for two reasons. One, its easy to look back and second guess decisions made under such extreme conditions. Second he feels its largely unproductive; we should concentrate on learning from mistakes, not thrashing ourselves because of them. The first error was moving troops up to the forward positions at Pyongnuri-gang inlet [henceforth, for obvious reasons, the 'inlet'] immediately after the Marines left the position. The 31st RCT mission was to protect the Marines flank on the east side of the reservoir, and army units were rushed to Hagaru-ri pell-mell.

"...after General Almond left to return to Hagaru-ri, Lieutenant Colonel Faith and Lieutenant Smalley ripped their Silver Stars off their jackets and threw them into the snow." This pivotal passage from the text "East of Chosin" reveals Lt. Col. Don Carlos Faith's disgust not just with his increasingly desperate situation, but with also his chain of command. Author Roy Appleman offered little to explain the military culture and key personalities behind this event. This book provides a very good description of WHAT happened during the 100 hours that it took for the 31st Regimental Combat team, a U.S. Army unit of 3,000 men, to be encircled and destroyed in North Korea in December 1950. The book is a good page-turner for anyone wanting a blow-by-blow account of what happened. The writing style is well above average for a military history book; drama and tension are woven into a story that is constructed primarily from survivors' first-hand recollections. The bulk of the book is a timeline of events. Chapter 22 provides a lengthy analysis entitled "Could Task Force Faith Have Been Saved?" The author synthesizes his conjecture with observations shared by survivors. By failing to examine military organizational culture as it then existed, and especially the personalities of the key leaders, the story of Task Force Faith remains unexplained. Why would such a reckless mission be undertaken, and why was it executed the way it was? Or in so many words-- What were they thinking? To be fair, an excursion into personal backgrounds would have made the book more laborious to read. Fortunately, separate analyses appear elsewhere to complement to "East of Chosin." One is Ray Vallowe's research as posted on the "Korean War Educator" website.

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