



Refighting the Last War

D. Clayton James

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Distinguished historian D. Clayton James offers a brilliant reinterpretation of the Korean War conflict. Focusing on the critical issue of command, he shows how the Korean War is a key to understanding American decision-making in all military encounters since World War II.

Korea, the first of America's limited wars to stem the tide of world communism, was fought on unfamiliar terrain and against peasant soldiers and would become a template for subsequent American military engagements, especially Vietnam. And yet, the strategic and tactical doctrines employed in Korea, as well as the weapons and equipment, were largely left over from World War II.

James, the master biographer of MacArthur, uses studies of military crises to examine the American high command in the Korean War. He explores the roles, leadership, personalities, and prejudices of five key commanders—President Harry S. Truman; Generals Douglas MacArthur, Matthew B. Ridgway, and Mark W. Clark; and Admiral C. Turner Joy—and then looks at six crucial issues confronting them in that conflict. From the decision made by Truman, without congressional approval, to commit United States forces to combat in Korea, to MacArthur's persistent fight for approval of his dangerous plan to assault Inchon, to the judgment to finally open truce negotiations, these turning points illuminate the American way of command in wartime. James analyzes the ground-level results and long-term implications of each choice, and sensitively explores the course that might have followed if other options had been taken. Probing the nature and consequences of these military resolutions, James shows how the conduct of the Korean War, like every new war, bears the imprint of the preceding one.

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