

Stanley Weintraub. *A Christmas Far from Home: An Epic Tale of Courage and Survival during the Korean War.* Boston: Da Capo Press, 2014. Maps. 304 pp. \$26.99, cloth, ISBN 978-0-306-82232-2.

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

A Christmas Far from Home is a narrative about combat operations during the autumn and winter of 1950, focusing on the Chinese counteroffensive. Stanley Weintraub uses the holiday as a narrative frame for a description of historical events and vilification of senior American commanders, specifically General Douglas MacArthur and the X Corps Commander, Major General Edward “Ned” Almond. The book extols both Major General O. P. Smith, commanding general, First Marine Division, and General Peng Dehuai, commander of the Chinese Communist Forces.

The author inserts select historical events going back to World War II to illustrate MacArthur’s self-indulgence during Christmas 1941 in Bataan and the poor performance of the Almond-led 92nd Infantry Division during the Italian campaign in 1944-45. However, he neglects to use events more relevant to the narrative. For example, the landing at Inchon in September 1950 is mentioned briefly, but the dire situation at the Pusan Perimeter during the late summer of 1950 is omitted completely.

Fifty percent of the book is dedicated to X Corps operations in and around the Chosin Reservoir. Weintraub uses multiple first-person accounts from soldiers and marines to describe the desperate struggle to survive both Chinese attacks and the extreme elements. General Walton Walk-

er’s Eighth Army operations are weaved throughout to illustrate operational developments along the broader front.

MacArthur is presented as a “war tourist” making frequent flights to Korea for a meeting or meal and returning to Japan the same day (p. 113). Almond lives behind the front in “grotesque luxury” while his men freeze and starve (p. 40). He flies forward to award “unearned medals and ribbons” (p. 97). Almond is portrayed as overly aggressive, sending units forward regardless of enemy reports from subordinate commanders, placing his divisions in great peril. Smith receives far better treatment as a “Marine’s Marine,” brave and cautious but obedient to Almond’s orders. The Chinese commander, Peng, is shown as tactically gifted and ingenious, and as having a deep affection for his troops. Weintraub describes the X Corps evacuation of Hungnam, Christmas 1950, in great detail and praises the operation’s success in evacuating the entire corps along with Korean civilians and operational unit equipment. He, however, fails to acknowledge Almond’s role and instead describes a self-indulgent birthday celebration for Almond during the evacuation.

The book does an excellent job in using first-person accounts to describe the raw and desperate fight in and around the Chosin Reservoir. The work features only two maps, one of Korea and

one of the marine area of operations. More detailed maps, including unit locations, would have provided the reader with a clearer picture of operational movements. The personal bias of the author toward both MacArthur and Almond is apparent throughout, detracting from the publication's objectivity. He selects events unrelated to the Korean War to support his thesis on MacArthur and Almond but fails to provide depth on events that occurred in the summer of 1950, required to properly set the context of the succeeding campaign.

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