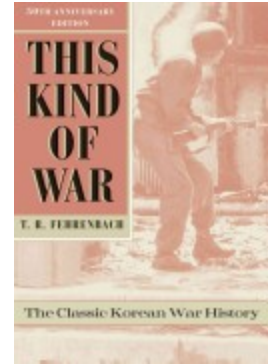




**Read2Lead Module**  
*This Kind of War*  
*A Study in Unpreparedness*  
by T.R. Fehrenbach



Book summary from the Hoover Institution: “A journalist rather than an academic, Fehrenbach (1925-2013) wrote larger-than-life history of a heroic bent. He is remembered for the bestselling *Lone Star: A History of Texas and Texans* (1968), whose emphasis on gun-slinging white men now makes it politically incorrect. But he also wrote the sad and beautiful *Comanches: The Destruction of a People* (1974), which shows great admiration for Native Americans. *This Kind of War* originally appeared in 1963 with the subtitle of *A Study in Unpreparedness* and was republished in a new edition in 1994.

Although *This Kind of War* starts with a quotation from Sun Tzu, Fehrenbach adopts a Clausewitzian approach. He understands the Korean conflict not as a test of power but of wills, in particular, of American will. The Communists, he writes, doubted that the United States “had the will to react quickly and practically and without panic in a new situation.” They were wrong, but it cost ca. 37,000 American lives to prove it.

Fehrenbach’s framework is tragic. The United States was unprepared to fight a limited war halfway around the world and when it intervened it overreached before finally winning partial victory and painful wisdom. If there is almost poetry in the author’s understanding of Americans’ frustration over Korea there is also prophecy in his statement (in 1963) that they would face other frustrating conflicts all over the globe.

Although a history, *This Kind of War* has the vividness of a memoir. It is based largely on personal narratives of small-unit commanders. “This is very much a platoon leader’s book,” the author writes. He himself commanded U.S. army units in Korea at company and battalion as well at the platoon level.

Fehrenbach’s prose style takes no prisoners. Of Korea’s war-torn history he says, “the people of the Hermit Kingdom wished to be left in peace. The wish is hopeless, for Korea is a buffer state.” (p. 10) Of the North Korean People’s Army, he writes, “Hesitancy ... was cured neatly, efficiently, and permanently by the application of a pistol to the back of the head.” (p. 5) He describes MacArthur’s ill-fated invasion of North Korea thus:

Because Washington permitted soldiers to make and to act on decisions that were beyond the purview of the military, because it forced them to bring purely military thinking into matters that remained in essence political—in short, because Washington still sometimes acted as if there could be a separation between war and politics, the United States, intoxicated with the heady taste of triumph, was heading for disaster. (p. 189)

Unfortunately, Washington still hasn't learned the lesson.”

### **What is Read2Lead?**

Read2Lead is a series of book studies published by the Center for Junior Officers, a small Army research center dedicated to empowering junior officers to develop themselves and their teams. Read2Lead modules give junior officers a ready-to-use product that they can integrate into leader professional development programs.

### **What's in this module?**

Every Read2Lead module contains:

- A short summary of the book that you can circulate to prime people for reading
- Advice for running your Read2Lead session
- A series of questions that can be used in multiple sessions, with options for using the questions over different lengths of time
- Additional resources that may be helpful for the facilitator

### **What do I need to provide to run a Read2Lead program?**

First, the time. Read2Lead sessions work best when they're done over multiple sessions, so participants can digest books in small “chunks” instead of trying to cram them in all at once. Make sure you give your participants enough time to read the book and not fake the funk.

Second, the books. Books can be purchased with a government purchase card if they remain in the hands of the unit. Buying books for a Read2Lead session can be a great kickstarter for a battalion or even brigade library. You can also provide the books to Soldiers with the expectation that they pass them along to another Soldier when they are done with them. If you choose this approach, you should ensure you mark the books appropriately per the purchasing regulations and legal guidance of your organization.

Third, the space. Read2Lead sessions should be conducted in spaces where everyone can hear and see one another. Be creative: maybe you do them as hip-pocket training on a range, or at the end of motor stables. Or as a brownbag lunch in a barracks dayroom.

When you run the actual session, think of it as a time for your Soldiers to think outside the box, discuss something beyond the day-to-day concerns of the unit, and improve

their communication skills. The questions provided on the subsequent pages are a starting point, but feel free to add or substitute your own to make the session more meaningful for your Soldiers.

### ***This Kind of War 8 Week Program Questions***

8 weeks is the optimal timing for this book. It minimizes the number of pages per week and helps readers consume the book in proportion to Fehrenbach's original sections.

#### *Week 1: Chapters 1-6 (62 pages)*

- What factors made Korea vulnerable and appealing for military occupation? What geopolitical factors in the 20th century led Korea's invasion and occupation in June 1950?
- How did the enemy exploit sustainment weaknesses to contribute to the US withdrawal to the Pusan Perimeter?
- What was the role of KMAG in June 1950? Was there a clear distinction of duties from American advisors to the KMAG in case of an attack from the NKPA?

#### *Week 2: Chapters 7-11 (54 pages)*

- The narrative Fehrenbach gives us about TF Smith is that the equipment was too old and the Russian armor too strong. Challenge this. Look at the steps required to put a bazooka into operation and the armor stats on a T-34 tank. What else could have caused the bazooka rounds to have no effect? What parallels can you draw between the Soldiers of TF Smith and our own Soldiers/Leaders?
- Why did the US not know or understand the armor threat in Korea already? Where was the national level intelligence apparatus to collect such information? Why didn't the US not equip the US Forces to deal with one of the biggest threats (armor) of the war?
- What warfighting functions contributed most to Americans' continual defeat and withdrawal to the Pusan Perimeter in the summer of 1950? Answer generally or focus mainly on Task Force Smith for examples to support your analysis.

#### *Week 3: Chapters 12-16 (61 pages)*

- What role did initiative play for UN Forces in the Pusan Perimeter and their subsequent breakout?
- The Eighth Army did not realize that a hole eight miles deep and six miles across was penetrated in the front lines until two regiments were "disintegrated." Why was there a lapse in communication between the front lines and the Eighth Army mission command? With these defeats, the Mission Command commanders under General Walker became profoundly "defeatist." How does this attitude affect MDMP?
- What is your response to the steadfastness of MacArthur's insistence on the Inchon landing? How does it change, had the mission gone otherwise?

#### *Week 4: Chapters 17-21 (57 pages)*

- How does terrain affect communication and therefore tactical movement? How did it influence U.S. and ROK forces once they crossed the 38th parallel? What did the terrain in Korea affect communications compared to previous wars (WWII)?

- As UN forces marched north, there was evidence of the Chinese joining the conflict. Despite the evidence, General MacArthur and his staff believed “the Chinese would not dare intervene.” What do you think we are “wishing away”? What are capability or piece of equipment are we putting too much reliance on?
- Discuss the three advantages the CCF possessed over UN Forces. What can we learn from them?

Week 5: *Chapters 22-24 (52 Pages)*

- This section contains accounts of very competent brigade and battalion leadership under immense pressure. Choose a leader from this section and write about how their example contributed to the success of their unit in the action discussed in Chapters 22-24.
- Respond to the author’s commentary on “defending the frontier,” if you still think it is a valid perspective, and relate that to the nation’s wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.
- What do you think soldiers thought of their leadership at this point in the war? Why?

Week 6: *Chapters 25-28 (48 pages)*

- Fehrenbach states “...the public demanded that the Army be changed to conform with decent, liberal society.” What are the positives/negatives of such movement?
- What is your response to his tale of the Glousters, and how does that influence your perspective on the U.S. Army’s use of regimental affiliation?
- The Chinese treated all POWs the same regardless of rank. This resulted in the degradation of discipline among POWs. Do you think this was the intended outcome or just 2nd and 3rd order effects? What would you do to combat the loss of morale among POWs?

Week 7: *Chapters 29-34 (59 pages)*

- Korea was the first war where the US Army rotated Soldiers in and out of theatre in significant numbers, a practice that has continued ever since. Are the benefits worth the cost, when our enemies remain in place and continue to learn? What are the pros and cons of each system?
- If Dr. Rhee had his conditions for peace approved, what UN capability existed to guarantee no Soviet and Chinese assistance in north Korea?
- What can we learn from this section on the theme of readiness? What examples of readiness were presented and what tertiary effects were seen from readiness or lack thereof?

Week 8: *Chapters 35-40 (61 pages)*

- Which “Lesson” from the author do you most strongly agree or disagree with? Why?
- Would you have handled the POW crisis any differently? How and why?
- Given the protracted conclusion of the war, who would you consider its winners in 1953? How about now?

**Additional Resources:**

[West Point History Department’s Korean War Atlas](#)

[National Archives Korean War Collection](#)

[Wilson Center Korean War Digital Archive](#)

## ***This Kind of War 4 Week Program Questions***

If you are pressed for time, the smallest number of sessions we recommend is four. Pages and questions for that approach are below.

### *Week 1: Chapters 1-11 (116 pages)*

- What factors made Korea vulnerable and appealing for military occupation? What geopolitical factors in the 20th century led Korea's invasion and occupation in June 1950?
- What was the role of KMAC in June 1950? Was there a clear distinction of duties from American advisors to the KMAC in case of an attack from the NKPA?
- The narrative Fehrenbach gives us about TF Smith is that the equipment was too old and the Russian armor too strong. Challenge this. Look at the steps required to put a bazooka into operation and the armor stats on a T-34 tank. What else could have caused the bazooka rounds to have no effect? What parallels can you draw between the Soldiers of TF Smith and our own Soldiers/Leaders?
- What warfighting functions contributed most to Americans' continual defeat and withdrawal to the Pusan Perimeter in the summer of 1950? Answer generally or focus mainly on Task Force Smith for examples to support your analysis.

### *Week 2: Chapters 12-21 (118 pages)*

- What role did initiative play for UN Forces in the Pusan Perimeter and their subsequent breakout?
- What is your response to the steadfastness of MacArthur's insistence on the Inchon landing? How does it change, had the mission gone otherwise?
- As UN forces marched north, there was evidence of the Chinese joining the conflict. Despite the evidence, General MacArthur and his staff believed "the Chinese would not dare intervene." What do you think we are "wishing away"? What are capability or piece of equipment are we putting too much reliance on?
- Discuss the three advantages the CCF possessed over UN Forces. What can we learn from them?

### *Week 3: Chapters 22-28 (100 Pages)*

- This section contains accounts of very competent brigade and battalion leadership under immense pressure. Choose a leader from this section and write about how their example contributed to the success of their unit in the action discussed in Chapters 22-24.
- Respond to the author's commentary on "defending the frontier," if you still think it is a valid perspective, and relate that to the nation's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.
- What is your response to his tale of the Glousters, and how does that influence your perspective on the U.S. Army's use of regimental affiliation?
- In the beginning of the chapter, "Proud Legions," Fehrenbach outlines the premise that Americans were outfought at the outset of the war. How does one imbue aggressive spirit into a peacetime force?

Week 4: *Chapters 29-40 (120 pages)*

- If Dr. Rhee had his conditions for peace approved, what UN capability existed to guarantee no Soviet and Chinese assistance in north Korea?
- What can we learn from this section on the theme of readiness? What examples of readiness were presented and what tertiary effects were seen from readiness or lack thereof?
- Which “Lesson” from the author do you most strongly agree or disagree with? Why?
- Given the protracted conclusion of the war, who would you consider its winners in 1953? How about now?

**Additional Resources:**

[West Point History Department's Korean War Atlas](#)

[National Archives Korean War Collection](#)

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