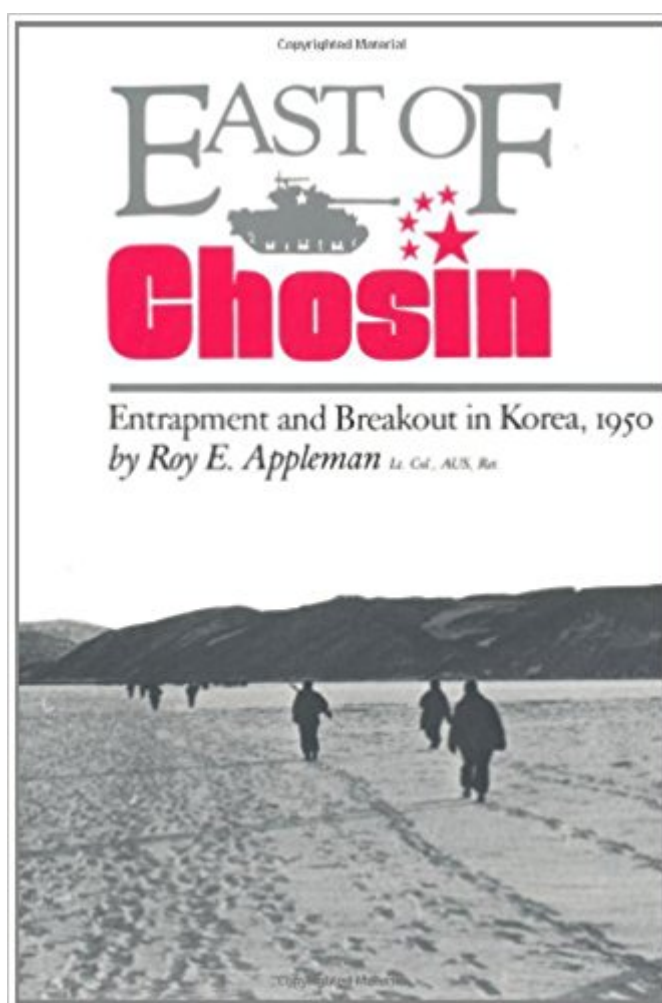


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# East Of Chosin: Entrapment And Breakout In Korea, 1950 (Williams-Ford Texas A&M University Military History Series)



## 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.

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## Customer Reviews

Appleman's book clears up one of the nagging mysteries of the Korean War: the fate of the 7th U.S. Division's Task Force Faith between November 27 and December 1, 1950, when Chinese forces surrounded it along the icy shores of the Chosin Reservoir. Due to poor command decisions and lack of communication, only 385 out of some 3000 GIs made it back to the relative safety of the Marine perimeter nearby. Appleman addresses the oft-debated question of why the Marines did not send a rescue force, and the degree to which the sacrifice of the GIs enabled the 1st Marine Division to accomplish its successful retreat. Based on analysis of official records and interviews with survivors, this study can be appreciated as a highly suspenseful account of a military catastrophe and as an inverted object lesson in field command under the worst possible conditions. As the author remarks, "It would be hard to find a more nearly hopeless or more tragic story in

American military history." Appleman wrote the highly regarded *South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu*. Photos. Copyright 1987 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Preloaded Digital Audio Player edition.

Much has been written about the Marines' fighting retreat from the frozen Chosin Reservoir after they were overwhelmed by Chinese troops during MacArthur's push to the Yalu River. Several small Army units also took part in the action, but their story has been neglected until now. Appleman is a U.S. Army historian, and he writes for a professional audience. The casual reader will be perplexed by the book's intricate description of military units, place names, and timetables, but will appreciate the complexities of modern ground combat. This microscopic study nicely supplements the larger canvas painted in Alexander Bevin's *Korea: the first war we lost* (LJ 6/15/86). For serious military collections only. Raymond L. Puffer, U.S. Air Force History Prog., Los Angeles Copyright 1987 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Preloaded Digital Audio Player edition.

"...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. Another is the 2007 master's thesis "Organizational Leadership in Crisis: The

31st RCT at Chosin Reservoir," prepared by Maj. Paul Berquist, also available online as of late 2011. The latter not only describes the event, but also examines the personalities involved. For example, we now understand that Lt. Col. Don Carlos Faith was politically shrewd in obtaining promotions and selecting his staff for occupational affinities rather than experience. We also learn that Gen. Edward M. Almond had put Faith on notice for a perceived lack of aggressiveness during earlier campaigns. This suggests that Faith may at first have suspended his better judgment at Chosin as he strove to prove himself to his superiors. The same thesis also analyzes the rapid deployment of forces under Gen. Almond's command in Korea just prior to the Chosin campaign. Almond's penchant for the strategies displayed by U.S. Civil War Confederate cavalry apparently didn't apply well to road-bound, mechanized troops dependent on long supply chains. The Berquist thesis describes a perfect storm of poor organizational design, limited communications technology, and interservice rivalry that doomed the men of Task Force Faith. It's also useful to remember the dynamics of professional advancement in the military: one bad fitness report from a superior can derail an officer's career. This may help to us to understand not only General Almond, but also the curious final actions of Col. Allan MacLean, the initial commander of the task force who would be succeeded by Lt. Col. Faith. One may conclude that Task Force Faith's demise ultimately reflects the misplaced arrogance of Gen. Douglas MacArthur and his advocacy of atomic weapons as a solution to Chinese intervention in the Korean War. To wit: Why bother to deploy fully equipped field armies when you can always drop the bomb?

If you read any book about the Korean War or the Chosin Reservoir battle in particular, make sure that you read this account. The story would make a terrific movie as there are so many powerful personal attributes involved. This book is a very in-depth and detailed and tragic account of the encirclement, siege, breakout attempt, disintegration and destruction of Task Force Faith (US Army Regimental Combat Team 31) during the Korean War. Whenever I see 'Chosin Reservoir', I think of the USMC's breakout from encirclement by the Chinese. That the US Army, particularly Task Force Faith played such a significant and tragic role in this battle was unknown to me, and I suspect by many people not intimately informed about the Korean War. The book gives first hand combat accounts from US forces about the battle. I suspect that if detailed information about this battle was available from the Chinese perspective, it would have been included. That would be very interesting. As it is, the book details the on-the-ground conditions that Task Force Faith faced, and the book also briefly discusses the strategic situation in Korea at the time. The book in my perspective is a sobering reminder that the US military should not be complacent in thinking that they will inherently

prevail over any enemy just because they have a slight technological advantage. What really stands out in this chronicle is the heroism of various combat officers, the ineptitude of some staff officers calling the shots, the necessity of well established and functioning intelligence and communications, and what happens to soldiers when unit cohesion and leadership are severely depleted or destroyed. It is a sad and tragic story, and unfortunately largely unknown in the US populace. Hopefully it is well known by the US Military so that it does not happen again in some future conflict. Unfortunately, it's just my opinion that the US Military has far too many social and other issues that are being concentrated on instead of more preparation for situations like this. If a similar situation develops in the future with an enemy that has similar resources to US forces, it's my opinion that the US forces will not fare any better than Task Force Faith, and will probably fare worse. The odds and horrid conditions that these men faced were tremendous.

This book is hard to read. Not because it isn't well written, but because it tells in starkly real terms the horror of war. The story of Task Force Faith gets short shift in many Korean War histories as opposed to the Marine breakout from Chosin, but the Army Regiment surrounded East of Chosin was weaker than the Marine Division on the West Side, had little support from high command and faced the same odds, after four horrible days of fighting with little ammunition, killer cold, and needing to transport over 500 wounded these brave men tried to fight out of an encirclement as encompassing as Little Big Horn. Like I said hard to read. One criticism, after all these years, I still detect slight racial stereotyping that was so in vogue in the 50's when recounting the deeds of the Chinese troops. I give great kudos to the brave Americans who tried to fight their way out of the trap, but am amazed also at the bravery of the Chinese soldier. All that the Chinese had going for them was numbers and the stupidity of the American high command. The US firepower and air power was devastating [the descriptions of napalm bombing are terrifying], Chinese supply chain was poor, their weapons mainly captured American, and if the Americans weren't ready for the brutal cold neither were these poor peasants. Reading about the slaughter on both sides brings home the horror and ultimate futility of war.

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