



# **On Desperate Ground: The Marines at The Reservoir, the Korean War's Greatest Battle**

*Hampton Sides*

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12 hrs 8 mins

**From the *New York Times* bestselling author of *Ghost Soldiers* and *In the Kingdom of Ice*, a chronicle of the extraordinary feats of heroism by Marines called on to do the impossible during the greatest battle of the Korean War**

On October 15, 1950, the vainglorious General Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander of U.N. troops in Korea, convinced President Harry Truman that the communist forces would be utterly defeated by Thanksgiving. The Chinese, he said with near certainty, would not intervene in the war.

As he was speaking, 300,000 Chinese soldiers began crossing the border. Led by the 13,000 men of the 1st Marine Division, the Americans moved far north into the trap Mao had set for the arrogant MacArthur at the Chosin Reservoir. What followed was one of the most heroic - and harrowing - operations in American military history. Faced with annihilation, and temperatures plunging to 20 degrees below zero, the surrounded Marines fought through the enemy forces with ferocity, ingenuity and nearly unimaginable courage.

Hampton Sides's superb account of the battle relies on years of archival research and interviews with scores of Marines and Koreans who survived the siege. While expertly chronicling the follies of the American leaders, this is an immediate, grunt's-eye view of history, enthralling in its narrative pace and powerful in its portrayal of what ordinary men are capable of in the most extreme circumstances.

## On Desperate Ground: The Marines at The Reservoir, the Korean War's Greatest Battle Details

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# **From Reader Review On Desperate Ground: The Marines at The Reservoir, the Korean War's Greatest Battle for online ebook**

## **Karen says**

A magnificent story by the author of *In the Kingdom of Ice* about the key battle at the Chosin Reservoir during the Korean War. The details of the war's greatest battle are stunningly written. I loved everything about this book which covered details of tactics, politics, heroism, major historical character portrayals.

The marines fought like never before in history. Inter-relationships between the various military elements - Army, Marines - were meticulously researched by Sides. Sources include written accounts, books, interviews of actual participants and historical archives. I don't think Sides left any stone unturned. Gripping!

Infuriating to discover the political missteps of General MacArthur in placing the Marines and Army in grave danger and disregarding the intelligence and the input from senior officers on the ground. Overwhelming numbers of aggressors, supply lines stretched too far, the preening of MacArthur and staff telling him only what he wanted to hear. He put so many soldiers at risk! The ingenuity and courage of boots on the ground and determination of the units who refused to capitulate was incredible. Thanks to Doubleday Books for providing an early ARC in exchange for an honest review.

This book was a pleasure to review and the third I've read by Sides. I've just downloaded the audio version of his 2006 work titled *Blood and Thunder: An Epic of the American West* - my book of choice for our 17 hour drive south this coming weekend!

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## **Casey Wheeler says**

I received a free Kindle copy of *On Desperate Ground* by Hampton Sides courtesy of Net Galley and Doubleday, the publisher. It was with the understanding that I would post a review on Net Galley, Goodreads, Amazon, Barnes and Noble and my fiction book review blog. I also posted it to my Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Google Plus pages.

I requested this book as I have read about the Korean War, but not one on the specific subject that this one covered. I have read a number of books by the author.

Like the other books of Hampton Sides that I have read, this one is well researched and written. It is an engaging read in that the author's writing style makes it almost like one is reading fiction and not history.

The book covers the events in the Korean War surrounding the push through North Korea after the initial invasion into South Korea. Specifically, it is about the Marines and the fighting in and around the Chosin reservoir near the North Korean border of the Yalu river. The author does an excellent job of showing how Douglas MacArthur's self centered ego almost cost the lives of thousands of American soldiers by grossly ignoring the potential of the Chinese to intervene when the American troops got close to the border.

Sides does an excellent job of detailing the stories of several different individuals at different levels within the troops involved in the battle and what eventually happened to them afterwards.

I recommend this book to anyone who has an interest in american history and in particular the Korean War.

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### **David says**

I essentially read this book in 2 sittings - it was really tough to put down. I had previously read Mr. Sides' book about the U.S.S. Jeannette, which I found compelling despite covering (IMO) a less interesting topic, so my enjoyment wasn't terribly surprising. I know almost nothing about the Korean War beyond what I "learned" from M\*A\*S\*H, and my desire for a little knowledge combined well with Sides' flair for storytelling.

As other reviewers have noted, the beginning of the book gives a description of some of the major players as well as some background of the situation, but the battle itself is described primarily via first-hand accounts. Regardless of whether the people involved remembered everything exactly as it happened, it's an effective approach which seems to have become fairly common lately.

Sides doesn't have many nice things to say about Douglas MacArthur. I have no basis to argue with him, but I wondered how a guy whom he (convincingly) describes as a delusional fool could become a five-star general. I think American Caesar is one of the books in my huge stack (probably purchased 20+ years ago), and I'll have to see if I can dig it out - like Sides, William Manchester was an author who wrote compelling history.

I won this book in a Goodreads giveaway. Thanks to Hampton Sides, Doubleday, and Goodreads for an excellent weekend.

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### **Linda Klager says**

What a powerful book! I am very interested in learning about our nation's history, although it was very difficult to read about the atrocities of the Korean War. The author did a wonderful job in his research. I would read more books written by Hampton Sides.

I very much admire and respect all of the soldiers who fought and/or died during this conflict. There were so many brave men listed in the book and, of course, the author could not tell all the stories of all of the men. I am so glad that Hampton Sides was able to meet with many of these men before they passed away.

I highly recommend this book to all history buffs or anyone interested in hearing strong accounts of the human spirit overcoming great odds.

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### **David Staples says**

I love reading. It has been a consistent hobby of mine since I was a wee lad. Books can be wildly entertaining, deeply convicting, and shockingly illuminating. I would not be the man I am today without books. Then there are times when they give you something priceless.

My father fought as a Marine in the Korean War. I have always known this and had great pride in his service.

I remember seeing the scarred hands and missing finger joints and having tangible proof of the cost of his time there. But he would never talk about the war. I did a report on it once and he gave me some very basic answers - nothing more than I had already found in an encyclopedia.

Last Sunday I was walking through Barnes and Noble with Gabe and I saw a book on the new arrival table. I don't know why it popped out at me. It was called *On Desperate Ground: The Marines at the Reservoir, The Korean War's Greatest Battle* by Hampton Sides. I bought it and started it that afternoon. Tonight I finished, and I feel I know my father better than ever before. I had no idea just how atrocious that battle was, the unimaginable pain and horrors those soldiers faced. I knew it was bad, but no wonder he never wanted to think about it. How would that experience change a 20 year old? Books can yield untold treasures. I never expected one would help me understand my late father better. Thank you Mr Sides for your amazing work.

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## **Kathleen says**

This is the best account of the Chosin Reservoir battle I have read. Sides is an excellent historian and his exhaustive research shows. But more than that, Sides knows how to weave individual stories into the broad overview and still keep the narrative pace moving smartly along.

Chosin was the site of the first major engagement between the United Nations coalition force commanded by the vainglorious Gen. Douglas MacArthur and Mao Zedong's People's Volunteer Army. Gen. Oliver Smith of the First Marine Division spearheaded the effort. North Korea had started the war five months earlier when it invaded the South. United Nations forces pushed the North Koreans back beyond the 38th parallel, and MacArthur thought he could defeat the North Koreans decisively so as to reunite the country. But, when the Americans got closer to the Chinese border, Mao decided to intervene in a BIG way—shifting 300,000 troops to the Korean peninsula from a planned engagement with Taiwan. These troops were ill-prepared for the brutal cold and lacked even sufficient guns. [Indeed, the most common guns were American ones scavenged from the Nationalists, who had lost to the Communists.]

Gen. MacArthur completely underestimated the Chinese's fighting prowess and disregarded his own intelligence reports indicating that the Chinese had crossed the Yulu River into North Korea. Gen. Smith was not so sanguine and did his best to prepare for the worst, while still following orders from headquarters. Those efforts allowed for one of military history's greatest tactical retreats.

The battle was fought in extreme cold, dipping to -25 degrees Fahrenheit on occasion. [And as my Marine son said after cold weather training in Canada, "Hell is not hot, it is cold."] The cold caused the radios to not work properly so communication was 'dicey'. The only positive thing that could be said about such cold was that it helped to cauterize wounds.

The 'butcher's bill' was huge. Casualties totaled 10,000, some 4,300 of them Marines. More than 7,000 other Marines suffered noncombat injuries, primarily frostbite. By contrast, the Chinese reported roughly 50,000 killed or wounded.

Highly recommend.

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## **Jim Jackson says**

Excellent historical novel! I knew next to nothing about the Korean war and this book filled me in on a lot of information. I highly recommend it for anyone interested in this era of our country's history.

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## **Michael says**

What a treat to have Sides create a narrative for us on a tough job our soldiers had in Korea and gather in some lessons relevant to our precarious position today in that part of the world. I've had nothing but 5-star reads with this talented storyteller and history sleuth, and this one continues that tradition.

His major focus here is on a critical campaign that almost started World War 3, namely MacArthur's initiative after landing at Inchon and retaking Seoul to invade North Korea and win the war with a drive to the Yalu River boundary with China. This triggered People's Republic of China's deployment of more than 200,000 troops across the Manchurian border. About 120,000 of these soldiers surrounded the 20 thousand or so American Marine and Army troops around the Choisin Reservoir (more properly "Changjin"). These men had been sent to the austere mountainous region with a fragile supply line in the form of a 78-mile stretch of two-lane road back to the port of Hungnam with many vulnerable choke points and a critical bridge. From the perspective of key officers and enlisted men, Sides delivers a well-crafted and harrowing story of how the Marine and Army troops held up to being surrounded and assaulted by overwhelming forces and boldly pulled off a successful fighting retreat. Along the way he covers enough of the whole war and antecedent events to provide a good context to this major turning point.

In addition to excessive enemies, the trapped UN forces faced the extreme challenges of the terrain and the winter weather. As can be seen below, the Choisin Reservoir region is rough country for the logistics of combat, and few soldiers beset there had any alpine warfare training or experience. And winter in high country there meant temperatures that often got to -20F. It's hard to convey the personal impact of such cold better than the following face. You could imagine the difficulties of digging a foxhole in such weather, the constant threat of frostbite, and challenges of treating the wounded.

Despite these challenges, advantages the UN forces included better clothing and weapons than the Chinese and Communist Koreans and, in clear weather, total dominance of the skies for air strikes and supply drops. The following map can provide some geographical perspective and illustrate the main phases of the war. In the bottom right, you can see how far the North Korean army had pushed the South Korean and occupying UN forces by September 1950, to a small region around Pusan. The brutal urban warfare leading to the loss of Seoul and desperate retreat to the south was well covered in another more comprehensive book about the war, David Halberstam's masterful *The Coldest Winter: America and the Korean War*. You can see how the invasion of Inchon opened the door for an effective assault on the flank and supply lines of the invaders. MacArthur, from his command site in Japan, couldn't resist following up the successful retaking of South Korea with an attempt to defeat the North once and for all. Truman warned him to pull back at any sign of engagement in the war by the Chinese, but the Joint Chiefs gave him plenty of latitude to push as hard he wanted. He was aware of lots of Chinese troops over the border in Manchuria, but he was blind to the possibility of their willingness to defend their client state and for a long time ignored plenty of evidence that

regular Chinese army troops were present in force (one soldier complained: “If you are shot and killed by an enemy that isn’t there, are you still alive?”). You can see how the Chosin Reservoir area was effectively the tip of the spear for whole military campaign. The book doesn’t delve much into the tough fighting by the 7th Army Infantry Division to the east of the Reservoir region or UN troop battles in northwestern Korea.

Fortunately, General Oliver Smith, Commander of the First Marine Division, was assigned to lead the advance through the Chosin region. He had experience with MacArthur’s overreaching in the Pacific theater of World War 2, where he fought with the First Marines in their useless slaughter in the taking of the island Pelieu (6,500 casualties). He had reason to believe that many Chinese troops had already infiltrated into North Korea and that they were advancing into a trap. His idiot supervisor as X Corps Commander and MacArthur acolyte, Major General Edward Almond, constantly pressing him to recklessly advance ahead, Smith slowed their advance and left supply caches along the way. He wisely took the initiative to build up the mining town at the southern tip of the Reservoir, Hagaru-ri, into a stronghold and direct his brilliant chief engineer, Col. John Partridge, to direct work around the clock to construct a landing strip suitable for C47 cargo planes for supply and evacuation of the wounded.

*Major General Oliver Smith, commander of the 1st Marine Division accompanies MacArthur on a tour after taking Incheon*

In the next map, the print will be too small, but it usefully illustrates the encirclement of the Marine positions to the west of the reservoir and of the Army task force on the east side. Lt. Colonel Faith’s story of holding in the face of mass attacks and then leading his Army units on a breakout is so tragic in its details. His column was effectively cut in half at one bottleneck and only 1,000 of 2,500 made it to the relative safety of Hagaru, a few hundred as individuals walking across the ice, wounded and freezing. To the west, the survivors of the embattled outpost Yudam took enough hills by fierce combat to enable them to break through multiple roadblocks and ambushes on the road to Hagaru. Another dangerous bottleneck to surmount was Tonkton Pass, which the particularly brave Fox Company, led a colorful Captain William Barber, had lost most of its men guarding for days from a strategic hill.

With consolidation of his forces at Hagaru, Smith eventually got the message through to command that retreat was necessary to prevent total obliteration (he famously preserved morale of his troops by exclaiming, "Retreat, hell! We're not retreating, we're just advancing in a different direction". The fighting retreat down the road toward the port of Hungnam was brilliantly orchestrated by Smith against tall odds. With just enough trucks to cram his wounded in, he made the sad decisions to execute their dying prisoners and to bury 117 of their dead in a mass graves. Many refugees followed in the convoy’s wake on foot. The convoy came to a dead stop at high point called Funchilin Pass due to a large span of the bridge there having being blown out by the Chinese. Calling again for the magic of Partridge’s engineering skills led to the unusual plan of having the Air Force deliver by parachute eight massive girders of 2,900 pounds each to repair the breach. Evacuation of the survivors of whole expeditionary force and 14,000 refugees to boat at Hungnam was a massive and successful effort involving nearly 200 ships.

*A sad but necessary breach of the Marine principle to not leave fallen comrades behind: the burial of 117 Marines, Army soldiers, and Royal British Commandos on the evacuation road south of Chosin*



The outcome of the Battle of Chosin Reservoir was a complete turnaround in the war. All of MacArthur's claim just weeks earlier to be close to ending the war was ashes in his mouth as he realized the impossibility of defeating China's vast forces and armaments supplied by the Soviet Union. When he was called on the carpet by Truman for getting him in very hot water with his electorate (and inspiring Sen. Joe McCarthy to call for his impeachment), MacArthur claimed to have intended to force China's commitment to their imperialist Commie designs. Before the war was finally over and back to the permanent standoff across the 38th parallel, both men supposedly considered use of nuclear weapons.

The result of the Korean War was a return to a standoff between two Koreas across the 38th parallel, which was supposed to be a temporary division between Soviet and Allied occupation zones after the ouster of Imperial Japan from the peninsula toward the end of World War 2. Compared to long wars like Vietnam and Afghanistan, the three years of fighting was relatively short. But the casualties were very high, making it a shame how it has become a forgotten war by many. According to Wikipedia, the U.S. suffered about 34,000 battle deaths, South Korea about 138,000, North Korea about 215,000, and China 114-183,000. Other NATO nations such as the UK, Canada, Turkey, and Australia suffered 300-1,000 combat deaths. As often neglected in the butcher's bill for war, civilian deaths dwarf those of the soldiers, with 374,000 estimated for South Korean and over a million for North Korea. The U.S. campaign of massive bombing of all North Korean cities in the war is the major contributor to the huge disparity. For every death recorded, multiply by 2 or 3 for the injured and maimed.

Seems hardly worth it to return to the status quo. All it proved is that the U.S. with NATO was willing to make sacrifices to block national dominos from falling. But in the mind of most enemy soldiers, they were defending their homeland, and the sense of threat felt by the PRC over American occupation of a land at their borders might be comparable to the U.S. stance if China or Russia were to invade Mexico. Regardless of the politics and whether you consider the fateful invasion of North Korea a tragic mistake, the contribution and sacrifices of soldiers on both sides should not be forgotten. Ironically, the civil war never technically ended. Amid all the Trumpery involving Korea this year, a small step forward was made when the presidents of the two Koreas met at the demilitarized zone in April and pledged to forge a peace treaty within a year's time.

In its excellent balance between coverage of the big picture of a war at the level of generals and politicians while weaving the human story of those in desperate combat, this book shares many of the virtues of Sides' "Ghost Soldiers", his previous history of the Battle of Bataan and successful rescue of survivors from a Japanese prison camp by an intrepid group of commandos. Sides excels in marshalling all available resources and his own interviews with participants to create a narrative as readable as a good novel. Unlike that book, he didn't delve much into the actions of the adversaries of the Americans or even into the stories of their allies. One exception is the details on the life of a Seoul medical student who was born in the north and eagerly served as a translator for the NATO forces.

This book was provided for review by Doubleday. If you want a bit of a preview, check out the excellent PBS documentary film, the "Battle of Chosin", for which Sides served as a consultant and commentator.

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## **Steven Z. says**

Hampton Sides latest book, *ON DESPERATE GROUND: THE MARINES AT THE RESERVOIR, THE KOREAN WAR'S GREATEST BATTLE* has met, or even surpassed the high standards for excellent narrative history that he has set in his previous works. The book is based on extensive interviews, memoirs, command of secondary sources, and the ability to place the reader along side historical decision makers and

the soldiers who carried out their orders. Whether Sides is writing about James Earl Ray and the assassination of Martin Luther King; the last survivors of the Bataan Death March; a biography of Kit Carson; or the late 19th century voyage of the USS Jeanette to the uncharted Arctic waters, he tells his stories with uncanny historical accuracy and incisive analysis.

In his current effort Sides conveys the authenticity and intensity of war on the Korean peninsula. His portrayal of the bravery of American soldiers is clear and unsettling as the realism of combat is laid bare for all to see. At times it is difficult to comprehend what these soldiers were able to overcome and reading the book during the week of Veteran's Day makes Sides work that more relevant.

Sides integrates all the important historical figures into his narrative, including American Marines and members of the US Army. We meet the egotistical General Douglas MacArthur and his staff of sycophants and supplicants. MacArthur can carry out the Inchon landing against all odds, but this logistical miracle seems to fuel an insatiable need for further glory. Fed by men like General Ned Almond whose main goal was to carry out MacArthur's wishes, sluffing off any advice or criticism by other planners the only result could be the disaster that encompassed American soldiers at the Chosin Reservoir and along the Yalu River. Disregarding intelligence that went against his own staff, MacArthur and Almond would push on disregarding and ignoring contrary opinions. President Harry Truman appears and seems to go along with MacArthur, particularly at the Wake Island Conference until proof emerges that over 250,000 Chinese Communist soldiers have poured into North Korea from mid-October 1950 onward.

Perhaps Sides most revealing portrait in explaining how American soldiers met disaster in the Chosin Reservoir region was his comparison of the views of Major-General Oliver Prince Smith, the Commander of the First Marine Division, and by the book Marine who described MacArthur as "a man with a solemn regard for his own divinity;" and Major-General Edward "Ned" Almond, MacArthur's Chief of Staff. All Almond cared about was speed, disregarding the obstacles that Smith faced in planning MacArthur's assault on northern Korea. Smith was a deliberate and fastidious planner who resented Almond's constant goading. He felt that Almond strutted around (like MacArthur!) and made pronouncements based on minimum intelligence. Almond was a racist who downplayed the abilities of Hispanic American troops and thought very little of the fighting ability of the Chinese. For Almond's part he viewed Smith as an impediment to his overall goals of carrying out MacArthur's wishes. He believed that Smith was overly concerned with planning minutiae, and his deliberate approach detracted from his grand plans.

Sides' portrayals of American soldiers and their character provide insights and provide a mirror for the reader into the person's abilities and their impact on their units, individual bravery, and the success or failure of their unit, battalion, or company's mission. Stories of Lee Bae-Suk, a Chinese-American who escaped North Korea as a teenager and enlisted in the Marines; Captain William Earl Barber, Commander of Company F, 2nd Battalion role protecting the Toktong Pass, a key route to the Chosin Reservoir, and a student of Sun Tzu as was Mao Zedong; the exploits of Seventh Marines' Company E, known as "Easy" Commander, First Lieutenant John Yancy at Hill 1282; Lieutenant Chew-Een who led the column to rescue Fox Company encircled by Chinese troops; the Jersey contingent of private Kenneth Benson and Private Hector Cafferata, Jr.'s heroism in Fox Company; Lieutenant Thomas Hudner who would earn the Congressional Medal of Honor for his bravery for his attempt to rescue Ensign Jesse Brown who hailed from a Mississippi sharecroppers background to become the first African-American fighter pilot in the US Navy; are among many along with other portrayals that are eye opening, as so many soldiers continued to fight on against all odds, despite wounds that would not have allowed most to even stand upright.

Sides' description of combat is almost pure in of itself, but completely unnerving. A prime example is the fight for Hill 1282 and the rescue attempt of Fox Company. The Chinese would attack American soldiers in

human waves by the thousands paying little, or no attention to casualties as Marines repeatedly cut them down. The carnage and suffering are hard to comprehend as is the bravery of US Marines fighting in sub zero temperatures in the middle of the night to protect a small piece of geography in northern Korea against an enemy, lacking in communications using the unnerving sounds of bugles, cymbals, whistles and such to organize their attacks. Battles are seen through the eyes of the participants and the will and desire of each man is on full display.

Sides has written an excellent narrative military history, but on another level, he has produced a study that highlights the relationship between men in combat and how they rely upon each other for their survival. It is a book about heroes, the idiocy of war, and the incompetence of decision-making by people at the top who are willing to send men to their deaths, in many cases without batting an eye. The book reads like a novel, but it presents history as truth, that cannot be denied or dismissed.

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### **Matt says**

Along with Candice Millard and Laura Hillenbrand, Hampton Sides is my favorite narrative-nonfiction author on the planet. (Erik Larson is a close fourth.) Sides's latest offering doesn't disappoint; 'On Desperate Ground' is a bracing story of courage and survival against impossible odds. The writing is exquisite. How does it compare to Sides's other books? Here is my entirely subjective ranking (with stars):

1. Hellhound on His Trail (5)
  2. Ghost Soldiers (5)
  3. On Desperate Ground (4.5)
  4. In the Kingdom of Ice (4.5)
  5. Blood and Thunder (3.5)
- 

### **Jon says**

This book brings to life the details of an amazing part of world history. The United Nations came to the aid of the Korean people right after the North Koreans launched an attack. The authors does a good job of setting the stage at the beginning by explaining the nations and the general. During the rest of the book he tells the tales of US Marines on the ground, pilots in the air, officers in command posts and even a Korean civilian desperate to help his sister make it across the bridge on the way to freedom in the south.

The book meshes well with the TV documentary on the PBS series, The American Experience, the Battle of Chosin. I watched the TV show a year of so ago and in the midst of this audio book I watched it again. A US Marine named Manert Kennedy was interviewed in the both the book and the documentary.

At the end of the book I was moved by how the Americans did not just evacuate their fighting forces; but they evacuated 100,000 Korean civilians, too.

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### **Peter Tillman says**

As this is a new book and will come due soon, I'm going to close it out as DNF, about halfway in. The writing is fully up to Sides' usual high standards, but I'm just not in the mood for it. I'll tell you why, below. As always, please read the publisher's intro (top of page) first. I'm likely done. Left unrated.

Taking a break at p. 89. Too much bad stuff: MacArthur's strutting peacock crap and fake deadlines, his toady Gen. Edward Almond (Marine Gen. Smith's boss), an incompetent, impulsive man, a violent racist, and a piss-poor general. MacArthur's fake deadline for victory, and the destruction of Seoul to meet it. The overconfidence of the American brass, Pres. Truman & Secretary of Defense George C. Marshall included. Army "intelligence" ignores the Chinese army captives, taken in North Korea. And why would the US want to antagonize the Chinese? The hydropower dams near the Chinese border, built by the Japanese in the 1930s, power Chinese Manchuria. The Americans thought the Chinese would just stand by, as US troops took possession of the dams, and marched up to the Chinese border? Good grief.

Stalled at p. 142. Gen. Smith has failed to dissuade Gen. Almond from his crazy plan to send the Marines into the mountains just before winter. The sole access is a one-lane mountain road. Gen. Smith builds a substantial airstrip and supply dump near Chosin Reservoir, for the Chinese ambush he thinks is coming. In Sides telling, this was Mao's plan all along, and he particularly wanted to mousetrap and defeat the Marines.

Sad premonitions of blunders & misjudgements in Vietnam, years later. Etc, etc.

Looking ahead, past where I read:

In early 1951, President Truman fired Gen. MacArthur for insubordination. Years later, he said:

"I fired him because he wouldn't respect the authority of the President. I didn't fire him because he was a dumb son of a bitch, although he was, but that's not against the law for generals. If it was, half to three-quarters of them would be in jail." Give 'em hell, Harry!

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## **Joseph says**

On Desperate Ground: The Marines at The Reservoir, the Korean War's Greatest Battle by Hampton Sides is the history of one of the greatest stories to come out of the Korean War. Sides is an American historian, author, and journalist. He is the author of *Americana*, *Hellhound on His Trail*, *Ghost Soldiers*, *Blood and Thunder*, and other bestselling works of narrative history and literary non-fiction.

The Korean War is America's forgotten war, and the heroics that took place in the war are often overlooked. Marines, however, do remember the events from the landing at Inchon to the evacuation at Chosin. Perhaps the Marine Corps most celebrated and most iconic leader Colonel Chesty Puller. Puller and the Marines left no man behind as they fought their way out of being surrounded at Chosin. Puller always saw the positive: "We've been looking for the enemy for some time now. We've finally found him. We're surrounded. That simplifies things." Temperatures were well below zero, and the Marines reported 7,338 non-battle casualties from the weather alone. The navy provided close air support and the air force dropped in supplies. If there was a time to see defeat this was it. There would be no defeat at Chosin. The Marines made an orderly withdrawal under heavy fire and against a force that vastly outnumbered them.

Sides tells the story of the forces involved at Chosin. Using the narrative form, he brings to life Marines and members of the other services and countries who fought the battle, I am not usually a fan of the narrative style in nonfiction writing, but here Sides breathes life into those who were there. Army and Marine Corps archives were used to form much of the narrative. Also used were interviews of over fifty who fought at Chosin and the personal papers of many others. *On Desperate Ground* puts a human voice on the battle and the war. More than just battle plans and casualty counts this book is about the people who were there.

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**Perri says**

On Desperate Ground had me as riveted as though this decades old Korean war story was in real time and the outcome not yet decided. Huge admiration for the unsung heroes and the sheer mettle of marines and others in perilous conditions, along with loathing (cough\* MacArthur\*) for others. Sides is adept at interspersing stories of the individual with the larger picture of the how and why of this epic battle. Hail to the Chosin Frozen Few! Thanks to Doubleday for the advance copy.

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**Cindy says**

Won this in a goodreads giveaway! Hampton Sides is one of my favorite NF writers. His writing is always clear and often inspiring. I knew almost nothing about the Korean War, but whether you do or don't, I think you'll find this story of the battles at the frozen Chosin Reservoir great reading.

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