

**Sandler, Stanley. The Korean War: No Victors, No Vanquished.  
Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1999.**

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[See table of contents](#)

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**Sandler, Stanley. *The Korean War: No Victors, No Vanquished*. Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1999.**

We are likely to see a lot of books on aspects of the Korean War in the next three years as that conflict moves through its cycle of fiftieth anniversaries. Korean veterans in the United States now have their own monument on the Mall, British veterans have had one in the crypt of St. Paul's cathedral for more than a decade, while Australian veterans participated in the dedication of their own memorial as recently as April 2000. With three major television documentary series made in the early 1990s and a growing number of books, memoirs and scholarly articles appearing on the subject, it is difficult any longer to justify Korea's claim to be an unjustly neglected or forgotten war.

A quick scan of Stanley Sandler's intentionally non-comprehensive bibliography will confirm this impression. Particularly since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the opening of Soviet and some Chinese records to Western scholars, the literature on Korea has taken off. It may not rival that for the Vietnam War in terms of size and disparity, but it equals it increasingly in quality. It is no longer possible to say, as it once was, that the Korean War could not be taught adequately at university level because there was insufficient literature to sustain it.

The growth in serious studies, and the release of once-sensitive materials from the other side, and from the US on issues dealing with intelligence activities, prisoners of war and racial tensions in the US military among other subjects, also means that a new round of more comprehensive and sophisticated general histories of the war is possible, and it is in this camp that Sandler's book should be placed. Although he has drawn on unpublished materials to some extent, this book is not the product of long hours in the relevant archives - a difficult proposition given the large number of national forces that participated in the United Nations Command and the continuing restrictions on access to materials in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and mainland China. Rather, it provides an excellent snapshot of the state of our knowledge of this complex postwar conflict at this moment in time.

Sandler rejects 1980s revisionism in his account of events in 1949-50. He is clear about responsibility for the war's outbreak, about Soviet involvement in such decisions, and about the nature of Kim Il-Sung's northern state. In all these judgments he draws upon recent scholarship based on Soviet and Chinese documents. He is scarcely blind to the shortcomings of Syngman Rhee's rule, either; one of the benefits deriving from the end of the Cold War is an end to the perceived need to "take sides" in historical debates. That being said, Sandler is quite clear that one of the two Koreas was, and is, preferable to the other.

The book is especially welcome for devoting space to subjects that generally receive little or no coverage in existing general accounts. The chapter on the other UN contingents draws attention to the fact that America did not fight this war alone, and that at the time Americans were grateful for the political, diplomatic and military assistance which these contingents provided. A number, such as those from the Commonwealth and Turkey,

boxed above their weight in operational terms. The chapter on the war's impact on the home front is also a useful addition, although Sandler notes the difficulty of saying anything much about conditions in North Korea while he perhaps underestimates the Korean War's impact economically in some places: Australians and New Zealanders remember the early 1950s as years of spectacular prices for wool, a major commodity in their export-oriented economies, while the soaring prices for rubber and tin, specifically, gave the British government the financial resources required to sustain the anti-communist counter-insurgency in Malaya in the 1950s, something which would not have happened in Britain's otherwise straitened circumstances at that time. His account of the experience of UN prisoners of war, and of Chinese allegations of germ warfare, likewise reflect recent scholarship and will give little comfort to the credulous.

Sandler concludes that the war had positive outcomes, but that these need to be viewed from a longer-term perspective. In the short-term it was a war with neither victors nor vanquished. But there were both winners and losers, and the single greatest losers in the conflict were, and remain, the hapless people of North Korea.

***Jeffrey Grey***

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