

# CONTENTS

	Maps and Illustrations /	viii
	Preface /	xi
	Abbreviations /	xiii
	Introduction /	xv
	Prologue: Verrières Ridge, Normandy, July 1944 /	3
1	War and Recruitment, June-August 1950 /	11
2	Rocky's Army, September 1950-April 1951 /	29
3	Into Battle, December 1950-March 1951 /	55
4	Kap'yong, April 1951 /	80
5	The Brigade Arrives, May-July 1951 /	108
6	The Commonwealth Division, July-October 1951 /	138
7	The First Rotation, October 1951 /	172
8	No Withdrawal, No Panic, November 1951 /	201
9	The Active Defence, December 1951-April 1952 /	227
10	The Professionals, May-June 1952 /	255
11	The Inactive Defence, July-October 1952 /	283
12	On the Hook, November 1952-April 1953 /	316
13	The Third Battalions, May-July 1953 /	346
	Epilogue /	371
	Notes /	378
	Bibliography /	408
	Index /	411

# MAPS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

## MAPS

- 1 Operation Spring, 25 July 1944 / 4
- 2 Korea, 1950-3 / 10
- 3 Invasion and counterstroke, 25 June-26 November 1950 / 19
- 4 Chinese intervention, 26 November 1950-21 April 1951 / 43
- 5 Eighth Army fronts, 25 January-24 June 1951, showing corps areas on 24 June / 68
- 6 27th British Commonwealth Infantry Brigade operations, 19 February-11 March 1951 / 71
- 7 27th British Commonwealth Infantry Brigade operations, 29 March-16 April 1951 / 84
- 8 The action at Kap'yong, 24-5 April 1951 / 94
- 9 The action at Chail-li, 30 May 1951 / 119
- 10 25th Brigade along the Imjin, Operations Dirk and Claymore, August 1951 / 150
- 11 Operations Minden and Commando, 11 September-5 October 1951 / 154-5
- 12 Defence of Hill 355, 23-5 November 1951 / 213
- 13 Operation Janus III, 10-11 December 1951 / 233
- 14 1st Commonwealth Division front, 31 March 1952 / 248
- 15 Attack on B Company, 1 RCR, 23 October 1952 / 307
- 16 The Hook positions, 7 December 1952 / 328
- 17 Attack on C Company, 3 RCR, 2-3 May 1953 / 352

## ILLUSTRATIONS

- 39 Lt.-Col. J.R. Stone and Brig. J.M. Rockingham watch soldiers board the American transport USNS *Private Joe P. Martinez*, 25 November 1950. *DND Z6252-1*
- 72 Soldiers of 2 PPCLI move forward to renew the attack on Hill 419 on 24 February 1951. *NAC PA155531*
- 77 Patricias climb past an abandoned Chinese bunker during the March 1951 advance. *NAC PA171230*
- 92 View looking north from the village of Kap'yong toward Hill 677, September 1953. *DHH 681.009 D2*
- 95 View looking west-southwest across the Kap'yong valley toward Hill 677. *DHH 681.009 D2*

- 100-1 Looking northwest toward Hill 677 from the valley road.  
*DHH 681.009 D2*
- 117 Maj.-Gen. A.J.H. Cassels chats with Maj. R.D. Medland, 22 May 1951,  
the day 25th Brigade joined the I Corps advance north of the Han River.  
*NAC PA183422*
- 128 A Chinese shell explodes in the Imjin River on 10 June 1951, not far from  
the 2 PPCLI positions in the Hwangji-ri area. *NAC PA171319*
- 129 Soldiers of 2 R22eR patrol past a Korean farm in the Imjin salient, 14 June  
1951. *NAC PA183804*
- 131 The layout of 25th Brigade's main headquarters, 20 June 1951.  
*NAC PA177319*
- 133 A battery command post in action. *NAC PA128280*
- 136 Weary Canadian soldiers returning from patrol in the Ch'orwon hills,  
22 June 1951. *NAC PA143367*
- 163 Canadians improving occupied Chinese entrenchments overlooking  
the Nabu-ri valley during Operation Commando, October 1951. *NAC  
PA193470*
- 166 The view north from Hill 187 (east of Hamurhan village) along the line  
of hills occupied during the Commando advance, 26 June 1952. *DHH  
410B25.014 D2*
- 168 Looking west-northwest from Hill 187 toward the enemy positions on the  
far side of the Nabu-ri valley. *DHH 410B25.014 D2*
- 170 Continuation of the view across the Nabu-ri valley from Hill 187, 26 June  
1952. *DHH 410B25.014 D2*
- 185 Artillery spotters report the fall of shot on Hill 166 during Operation  
Pepperpot, 23 October 1951. *NAC PA183974*
- 187 Two soldiers of D Company, 2 R22eR, watch the explosion of Canadian  
shells from the base of Hill 166 during Operation Pepperpot. *NAC  
PA185023*
- 192 Dead Chinese of the 1st Battalion, 568th Regiment, 190th Division, 64th  
Army, 3 November 1951, after that unit's night attack on A Company,  
2 RCR, holding the Songgok feature in the Nabu-ri valley. *NAC PA184292*
- 193 Soldiers of 2 RCR search the lower slopes of the Songgok feature for  
wounded Chinese, 3 November 1951. *NAC PA183960*
- 195 The handover parade from 2nd Battalion to 1st Battalion, Princess  
Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, 5 November 1951. *NAC PA133399*
- 212 The view looking west down the Bowling Alley from the ridge east of Hill  
210. *DHH 410B25.014 D3*
- 215 Hill 210 as seen from the ridge to its east. *DHH 410B25.014 D3*
- 216 The 81 mm mortars of 2 R22eR fire in support of the battalion's  
D Company, holding out on the lower western slope of Hill 355, 23-5  
November 1951. *NAC PA184317*

- 218 Artillery illumination rounds light up Hill 355 during the Chinese attacks of 23-5 November 1951. *NAC PA188710*
- 221 Officers of 2 R22eR's D Company in one of their sandbagged entrenchments on the lower western slope of Hill 355. *NAC PA184260*
- 223 Lt.-Col. J.A. Dextraze briefs the CO of 1 R22eR during Lt.-Col. L.F. Trudeau's orientation visit to 25th Brigade, November 1951. *NAC PA184311*
- 235 Reverse slope dugout of 2 RCR, overlooking the Nabu-ri valley, December 1951. *NAC PA184267*
- 241 Two of the searchlights the Commonwealth Division borrowed from their American allies to provide 'artificial moonlight' over no man's land. *NAC PA184242*
- 253 Rockingham shows his replacement, Brig. M.P. Bogert, around the brigade's front-line positions, 21 April 1952. *NAC PA184728*
- 257 Lt. D.G. Hanson shakes hands with Rockingham as the brigade commander welcomes 1 RCR's officers to Korea, 10 April 1952. *NAC PA140699*
- 266 A Sherman tank of B Squadron, LdSH, fires its main 76 mm armament, 15 June 1952. *NAC PA188577*
- 279 One of twenty-four Royals wounded during the 1 RCR raid on Hill 113 on the night of 21-2 June 1952 is brought into the Canadian lines. *NAC PA184805*
- 288 The ground east of Hill 355, held by 1 PPCLI from mid-August to the end of October 1952, as seen from the ridge one mile east of Hill 210. *DHH 410B25.014 D3*
- 294 The ground north of Hill 355, as photographed from the 1 PPCLI forward positions, October 1952. *Robert S. Peacock collection*
- 310 Hills 355 and 227 as seen from the turret of a B Squadron, LdSH tank, 21 November 1952. *NAC PA128836*
- 324 View looking west toward the Hook positions across the Sami-ch'on River, 26 June 1952. *DHH 410B25.014 D1*
- 326 Lt.-Col. J.R. Cameron and Lt.-Col. H.F. Wood, 25 November 1952. *NAC PA185014*
- 332-3 The view north from B Company, 3 PPCLI position in the 'Right of Hook' or 'Sausage' entrenchments, December 1952. *Robert S. Peacock collection*
- 334 Hill 132, as photographed from the B Company, 3 PPCLI positions, December 1952. *Robert S. Peacock collection*
- 337 Part of the entrenchments in the Hook position occupied by C Company, 3 PPCLI, December 1952. *Robert S. Peacock collection*
- 347 Brig. J.V. Allard on a night tour of 3 R22eR's entrenchments, June 1953. *NAC PA134496*
- 353 Hills 97 and 123, held by C Company, 3 RCR during the Chinese raid on 2-3 May 1953. *DHH 681.009 D6*

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#### A NOTE ON THE TEXT

The Korean War was fought by all Commonwealth and US forces using the imperial system of measure, and it is the imperial system that is used throughout the text. The military contour maps used during the conflict, however, were metric for both contour lines and the superimposed 1,000-metre grid used for all map references. As a result, the height of specific features was always expressed on the military maps in terms of metres above sea level. The summit of Hill 355, for example, was 355 metres above sea level. The soldiers on the ground, however, would have referred to Hill 355 but described it as 1,000 feet high. Odd as it may seem, this mixed measurement did not cause any problems for the soldiers involved.

Korean geographical names are often followed by a descriptive, hyphenated suffix: 'bong,' 'pong,' or 'san' denotes a mountain; 'ch'on,' 'gang,' or 'kang' a river; and 'dong,' 'gol,' 'kol,' 'li,' 'ni,' or 'ri' a settlement.

Map 1 is adapted from C.P. Stacey's *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War*, vol. 3, *The Victory Campaign: The Operations in Northwest Europe, 1944-1945* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1960) and appears courtesy of the Canadian Forces. Maps 3 through 17 have been adapted from Herbert Fairlie Wood, *Strange Battleground: The Operations in Korea and Their Effects on the Defence Policy of Canada* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1966) and appear courtesy of the Department of National Defence. Several quotations from the same source also appear courtesy of the Department. Excerpts from Robert O'Neill, *Australia in the Korean War, 1950-53*, 2 vols. (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1981) appear courtesy of the Australian War Memorial. Quotations from Anthony Farrar-Hockley, *The British Part in the Korean War* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1995) are Crown copyright material reproduced with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

# ABBREVIATIONS

ADS	advanced dressing station
AG	adjutant general
AHQ	army headquarters
AP	armour piercing
AWL	absent without leave
bde	brigade
BM	brigade major
bn	battalion
CASF	Canadian Army Special Force
CCF	Chinese communist forces
CGS	chief of the general staff
CIB	Canadian Infantry Brigade
CO	commanding officer
coy	company
CP	command post
CRE	commander, Royal Engineers
DF	defensive fire
EUSAK	Eighth US Army in Korea
FDLs	forward defended localities
FOO	forward observation officer
FUP	forming up place
GOC	general officer commanding
GSO(1)	general staff officer, grade 1
HE	high-explosive shell
HMG	heavy machine-gun
I&R	intelligence and reconnaissance
IO	intelligence officer
KIA	killed in action
KMAG	Korean Military Advisory Group
KOSB	King's Own Scottish Borderers
KSLI	King's Shropshire Light Infantry
LdSH	Lord Strathcona's Horse
LMG	light machine-gun
MMG	medium machine-gun
MO	medical officer

MSF	Mobile Striking Force
NCO	noncommissioned officer
NKPA	North Korea People's Army
OC	officer commanding
OP	observation post
pl	platoon
PPCLI	Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry
PW	prisoner of war
R22eR	Royal 22e Régiment
RAP	regimental aid post
RAR	Royal Australian Regiment
RCHA	Royal Canadian Horse Artillery
RCR	Royal Canadian Regiment
RHLI	Royal Hamilton Light Infantry
RNR	Royal Norfolk Regiment
ROK	Republic of Korea
SP	self-propelled [gun]
sqn	squadron
TOO	tank observation officer
UNC	United Nations Command
WIA	wounded in action



# INTRODUCTION

The Korean War has often been characterized as Canada's forgotten war.<sup>1</sup> Fought on a remote peninsula in the Far East by a brigade-sized force composed primarily of professional soldiers, the conflict failed to capture the nation's attention in the same way that the mass mobilization of the two world wars had done. Indeed, had the United States not decided to intervene in the conflict, the successful invasion of South Korea by the country's communist North in June 1950 might well have become a footnote in the history of the Cold War. As it was, Washington's willingness to rescue the Seoul regime caught the Canadian government off-guard, while the Americans' ability to internationalize the conflict made it difficult for Canada to remain on the sidelines. Aided by a temporary Soviet boycott of United Nations proceedings, the United States enlisted the support of that international body in organizing resistance to the North Koreans' aggression. The creation of an American-controlled United Nations Command with military contingents from eighteen countries (four of which sent only medical units), in addition to the forces of the United States and the Republic of Korea, made the conflict the UN's first peace-making operation.

Despite the leading role Canada had played in the formation of the United Nations, Ottawa was initially hesitant in responding to the UN's call for military force. By early August, however, the public's demand for a significant contribution to the UN Command could no longer be ignored. Because the regular army included only three infantry and two armoured units, the government decided to recruit a new three-battalion brigade group, the 25th Brigade, by drawing on the large pool of Second World War veterans who had returned to civilian life in 1945-6. A flood of volunteers quickly filled the Canadian Army Special Force, and by December 1950 the first of the new units, the 2nd Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (2 PPCLI; the Special Force infantry units were designated 2nd battalions of the three regular infantry regiments), had been dispatched to the Far East. The Patricias arrived just as the UN forces – which had seemed on the verge of total victory in November – were being driven out of North Korea by the intervention of the communist Chinese. Over the next six months, offensive and counteroffensive would shift the front line up and down the peninsula, with 2 PPCLI's stand on a hill north of the village of Kap'yong in April 1951 becoming the best-known Canadian action of the war. The rest of the 25th Brigade arrived a month after that to take part in the UN's final advance to a defensive line just

north of the thirty-eighth parallel. In July 1951, the Canadian brigade joined with British, Australian, and New Zealand troops to form the 1st Commonwealth Division, the formation in which they would spend the remainder of the war.

The opening of truce talks that same month suggested that both sides were finally willing to accept the division of the two Koreas along the line of contact, but the optimism that greeted the armistice talks eventually turned to exasperation as the negotiations bogged down over the issue of repatriating prisoners of war against their will. While the tense first year of rapidly changing fortunes may have captured the Canadian public's imagination, the protracted stalemate – both on the ground and at the conference table – meant that the war gradually faded from the headlines. Soldiers continued to fight and die on the peninsula for another two years, but it was already obvious that there would be no clear-cut victory. With no major offensives planned and operations restricted to small unit engagements, by December 1951 the Korean conflict had become a war of patrols.

As Canada's ground force commitment dragged on into a second year, Ottawa decided to replace the Special Force units with those of the regular army. The professional soldiers of the 1st battalions arrived in the spring of 1952 to take their place in the Commonwealth Division's static positions and continued to hold the front line for the next year, mounting the occasional raid against the Chinese while having their own entrenchments raided in turn. The regular units were then replaced by the 3rd battalions for the final months of fighting until an armistice agreement was signed on 27 July 1953.

Although the Canadian formation carried the same designation throughout the war, this annual rotation of units and personnel meant that, in essence, three separate brigades served in Korea during the war: the Special Force units under John M. Rockingham; the regular army's 1st battalions under Mortimer Patrick Bogert; and the original training units, the 3rd battalions, under Jean V. Allard. The yearly changeover in personnel meant that arriving units had little detailed knowledge of the brigade's previous operations and were unaware of the shifts that had occurred in the Canadians' defensive methods and tactics. This lack of continuity led to the false assumption – made by soldiers at the time and historians afterward – that the brigade's defence of its static positions must have been conducted in much the same manner by whichever battalions were holding the front. Once the shooting war had ended, few, if any, Canadians were interested in what had actually happened during the twenty months of stalemate.

Before the war could pass completely from the public's consciousness, the army's historical section published *Canada's Army in Korea* in 1956.<sup>2</sup> This short official account is a collection of articles by Capt. Frank McGuire, the 25th Brigade's historical officer during the last year of the war, that originally appeared in the *Canadian Army Journal*. Ten years later, the historical section produced the Army's official history, *Strange Battleground*, by another Korea veteran, Lt.-Col. Herbert Fairlie Wood, a former commanding officer of 3 PPCLI.<sup>3</sup> Despite the first-hand

experience of the authors, these accounts were primarily descriptions of events, with Wood's history providing only the occasional suggestion that the brigade might have run into some tactical problems. *Strange Battleground* did, however, convey the professional army's disdain for the Special Force volunteers of the 2nd battalions. Placing the blame on an overhasty recruiting process, Wood gave an official endorsement to the public's perception that the Special Force had been a collection of misfit soldiers of fortune, men who were later replaced at the front by the spit-and-polish professionals of the regular 1st battalions. Even the publication of an official history did little to stimulate Canadian interest in the Korean War. Only a handful of popular histories were written in subsequent decades, with the first of these, published in 1983, appropriately subtitled *Canada's Forgotten War*.<sup>4</sup> Memoirs and first-person accounts have also been slow to appear – most have been published only in the 1990s – but are generally more useful, with the best being Robert Peacock's memoir, *Kim-chi, Asahi and Rum*, and John Gardam's collection of interviews, *Korea Volunteer*.<sup>5</sup>

Academic studies of Canada's involvement in the conflict are even fewer. Canadian diplomacy during the war was the subject of a 1974 book by Denis Stairs, *The Diplomacy of Constraint: Canada, the Korean War and the United States*, but its concentration on the US-Canada relationship meant that only passing reference was made to the situation on the battlefield. Nearly twenty years later two other historians, J.L. Granatstein and D.J. Bercuson, included three chapters surveying Korean operations in their *War and Peacekeeping: From South Africa to the Gulf – Canada's Limited Wars*. Published in 1991, the book provided only a basic narrative of events, with less analysis than the Canadian official history had contained twenty-five years before.<sup>6</sup>

Nor was the war of particularly great historical interest beyond Canada's borders. A year before *War and Peacekeeping* appeared, the British finally published the first instalment of their two-volume official history of the war.<sup>7</sup> Also written by a Korea veteran, the British history provided useful context for the Canadian experience, particularly in its use of Chinese sources, but like the earlier American army and marine official histories<sup>8</sup> had little new to say about the Canadian contingent other than what was already to be found in *Strange Battleground*. Aside from recognizing 2 PPCLI's stand at Kap'yong, other British and American historians have also made little reference to the Canadian brigade.<sup>9</sup>

The second volume of the Australian official history, published in 1985, on the other hand, contained several paragraphs that criticized the 25th Brigade's operations, particularly the Canadians' failure to patrol in sufficient strength to keep the enemy away from their entrenchments.<sup>10</sup> These criticisms were expanded upon by another Australian historian, Jeffrey Grey, in his 1988 study, *The Commonwealth Armies and the Korean War*.<sup>11</sup> The Australian perceptions of Canadian battlefield performance appear to confirm the reminiscences of Maj. Harry Pope, a company commander in Korea with both the 1st and 3rd battalions, published in the Royal 22nd Regiment

periodical, *La Citadelle*.<sup>12</sup> Pope's articles shed further light on the views he had first expressed in two 1953 memoranda critical of the brigade's defensive methods.<sup>13</sup> Although the Canadian official history had acknowledged Pope's criticisms, it largely dismissed them as 'generalizations ... based, in the main on his experience as a regimental officer. The application to other units of all his statements would probably not be valid without more evidence than is available.'<sup>14</sup> As we shall see, the evidence already existed. What was required was more research and analysis.

Pope's memoranda and the Australian comments led me to include a description of 25th Brigade shortcomings in a chapter on the Korean War that I wrote for a history of the Canadian Army, *We Stand on Guard*, in 1992.<sup>15</sup> The material uncovered in preparing that chapter suggested that the operations of the Canadian brigade merited a book-length academic study, one that could provide the sort of analysis lacking in *Strange Battleground*. As this manuscript was nearing completion in 1999, however, David Bercuson's *Blood on the Hills* appeared, the first academic treatment of the Canadian Army in Korea since Wood's history had been published over thirty years earlier. Bercuson's book picked up on the shortcomings outlined in *We Stand on Guard* (there had been no mention of Pope or the Australian histories in *War and Peacekeeping*) but failed to appreciate their significance. Like the Australians' blanket assessment of Canadian difficulties, *Blood on the Hills* made little distinction among the operations of the brigade under each of its three wartime commanders. Indeed, Bercuson took the patrolling criticisms Pope had made from his observations of the 1st battalions in 1952-3 and applied them primarily to the 1951-2 operations of the Special Force battalions, units that the R22eR major had never seen in action. In almost every respect, *Blood on the Hills* accepted the official history's distinction between the regulars and the volunteers of 1950. Bercuson, however, expanded on Wood's original distinctions to conclude, inaccurately, that the professionals must have outperformed the men of the Special Force on the battlefield. He characterizes the 2nd battalions as hurriedly 'slapped together' and rushed off to Korea after a 'badly conceived' training program, while describing the professional soldiers in the 1st battalions as being 'far better prepared to fight' when they arrived in the theatre. Indeed, Bercuson goes on to state that the 1st battalions 'were probably the best-trained ground force that Canada has ever put directly onto a field of battle. They were professional soldiers in every respect. When called on to use the skills they had acquired, they did so with determination and courage.'<sup>16</sup> *Blood on the Hills* failed to follow that analysis with a discussion of the tactical differences between the Special Force and regular army units. Failure to recognize the operational differences of the various infantry battalions also weakens Brent Byron Watson's *Far Eastern Tour*, published in 2002. Problems, according to these historians, resulted primarily from inadequate weaponry and poor training.<sup>17</sup>

This book offers a new, comprehensive account of the entire Canadian campaign while placing 25th Brigade operations in their proper context within the

Korean War as a whole. It provides a detailed study and critical analysis of the training, leadership, operations, and tactics of the main Canadian Army units employed during the war and, in so doing, challenges many of the earlier assumptions about the Canadians' battlefield performance. In assessing the formation's strengths and weaknesses, this book examines, for the first time, the brigade's operational methods under each of its three wartime commanders: those that distinguished the Special Force 2nd battalions of 1951-2 from the regular army's 1st battalions that replaced them, and the reforms instituted by Allard when he took command of the brigade in April 1953. As the arm in closest contact with the enemy, the infantry battalions' abilities largely determined the brigade's success, and the infantry units are the primary focus of this study.

In contrast to *Strange Battleground* and *Blood on the Hills*, I will argue here that the officers of the Special Force units exhibited greater professionalism in their approach to operations than the regulars of the 1st battalions, a difference encapsulated in the 'active defence' of the former and the 'inactive defence' of the latter. Although up to half of the Special Force enlistees had seen army service during the Second World War, it was the combat experience and leadership of the 2nd battalions' officers and NCOs – men who demonstrated a clear understanding of the profession of arms – that gave these units their operational superiority. The Special Force was also fortunate in being led by one of the most dynamic brigade commanders the Canadian Army has ever produced. Not only was Rockingham able to hone the Second World War battle experience of his men before departing North America, his forward style of combat leadership also ensured that his officers kept on top of the tactical situations confronting them once they arrived in theatre. Far from being 'slapped together' and rushed off to war, the 25th Brigade was, in fact, the best-prepared and most combat-ready force Canada has ever fielded at the outset of a conflict. Coming only five years after the country had mobilized a mass citizen army to fight the Second World War, the Korean War's timing made the conflict unique in Canadian military history. With the nation's wars usually spaced some twenty years apart, certainly no other formation Canada has sent overseas has been able to draw on as much recent operational experience in preparing itself for battle.

A tactical study of the differences in the 25th Brigade's operations under each of its three commanders also provides a valuable insight into the nature of successful battlefield command, with the Canadian experience in Korea demonstrating both how and how not to conduct military operations. The problems the brigade encountered in 1952-3 under Bogert's command resulted primarily from poor leadership, at both the formation and unit level, rather than inadequate weaponry. While most soldiers agreed there were no new lessons to be learned in Korea, it is clear from their lethargic performance that the 1st battalions' officers either did not clearly understand the old ones or, more likely, lacked the drive and initiative that is so necessary to success in combat. The Second World War veterans who officered

the Special Force battalions volunteered specifically to fight in Korea and understood the demands of combat when they joined. Slightly better armed than they had been in defeating the German army in northwest Europe five years earlier, the Special Force units proved to be skilled soldiers who believed in their superior military abilities and were not afraid to dominate the enemy. The regular officers of the 1st battalions, on the other hand, while also veterans of the 1939-45 conflict, had volunteered for a peacetime Canadian Army and were posted to the war zone simply as part of their job. At that stage of their military careers, some of them may not have been as highly motivated for combat as they should have been. As this book will demonstrate, this showed in their battlefield performance.