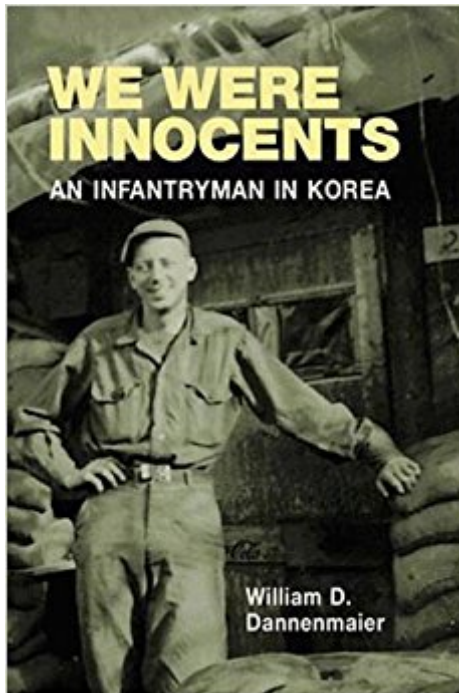




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We Were Innocents: An Infantryman In Korea



Synopsis

Known as the Forgotten War, the "police action" in Korea resulted in almost as many American combat deaths in three years as the Vietnam War did in ten. Yet for many Americans today, the Korean War brings to mind nothing more than the television series "M.A.S.H". William Dannenmaier served in Korea with the U.S. Army from December 1952 to January 1954, first as a radioman and then as a radio scout with the Fifteenth Infantry Regiment. Eager to serve a cause in which he fervently believed - the safeguarding of South Korea from advancing Chinese Communists - he enlisted in the army with an innocence that soon evaporated. His letters from the front, most of them to his sister, Ethel, provide a springboard for his candid and wry observations of the privations, the boredom, and the devastation of infantry life. At the same time these letters, designed to disguise the true danger of his tasks and his dehumanizing circumstances, reflect a growing failure to communicate with those outside the combat situation. Woven through the letters is Dannenmaier's narrative account of his combat experiences, including a vivid re-creation of the bloody battle for Outpost Harry, which he describes as "trivial and insignificant-except to the men who fought it. A high-intensity, eight-day battle for a hill American forces would abandon three months later with the signing of the truce, Outpost Harry was largely ignored by the press despite heavy casualties and many official citations for heroism. From his vantage point as an Everyman, Dannenmaier describes the frustration of men on the front lines who never saw their commanding superiors, the exhaustion of soldiers whose long-promised leaves never materialized, the transitory friendships and shared horrors that left indelible memories. Endangered by minefields and artillery fire, ground down by rumors and constant tension, these men returned - if they returned at all - profoundly and irrevocably changed. This intimate, revealing memoir, a rare account by a common soldier, is a tribute to the Americans who served in a conflict that has only recently begun to gain a place in official public memory.

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Customer Reviews

"Offers a well-written account of the experiences of GI Joe... It does for the Korean conflict what Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* did for WW I - it reveals the profound effect war has on the lives of the combatants." - Choice "Oddly affecting, combining as it does the aimless routine in military service (even in wartime) with the punctual moments of sheer terror that make the modern war memoir simultaneously so gripping and so confusing." - Virginia Quarterly Review

"Provides a fine soldier's view of war, perceiving its often cruel and stupid process but also seeing times when his fellow soldiers and sometimes even the enemy could escape the dehumanizing callousness of war in redemptive behavior." - Robert W. Lewis, North Dakota Quarterly

"Dannenmaier has a gift for layering incident upon incident, detail upon detail so that readers gradually build up a richly textured picture of an infantryman's life in Korea... I was a journalist covering veterans affairs for more than six years and in that time I heard a lot of war stories and read many more. This is one of the very best." - Mark Allen Peterson, Stars and Stripes Quoted from interview on Military.com "What would you like readers to come away with from the book?" "I'd like this to be an anti-war book. We've got to stop this nonsense. There have got to be better ways to solve problems than to send a bunch of young men off to kill each other." ADVANCE PRAISE "A little classic. Its real strength is that it brings back this 'police action' so vividly."- David C. Smith, coeditor of *American Women in a World at War: Contemporary Accounts from World War II* "Based largely on letters that Dannenmaier wrote to family members during the conflict, this memoir skillfully weaves primary documents with the author's later analysis to make an account that is often captivating in its immediacy and thought-provoking in its reflectiveness. Transparently honest, occasionally touching, and frequently humorous, *We Were Innocents* is war literature of a high order."- Malcolm Muir Jr., Austin Peay State University

First, this book is very well written and an enjoyable read. Dr. Dannenmaier's style is informal and engaging. It also offers a very good description of the many petty aspects of military life: the pointless regimentation, the boredom, the friendship, and the physical discomfort and depravation. I

would have given the book a five-star rating but for one serious flaw. I found the author reluctant to discuss the horrors of war that he surely experienced. Even his account of the battle for Outpost Harry is oddly detached, detached and vague in a way the rest of the book is whenever the subject is the violence of war. Although Dr. Dannenmaier is very articulate and detailed in his descriptions of the mundane aspects of military life and his judgments about the men he served with, he is almost silent about the experiences that so obviously traumatized him when he came home. His life after the war offers what we would call today an instance of "post-traumatic stress syndrome." While he describes horrible headaches, concern over his irrational feelings of rage, and an almost sociopathic regard for human life that he dealt with after the war, he says very little about the experiences that led him feel this way. In one touching scene he describes being near to tears when confronted with the first hot meal of good food in a warm, dry, and safe environment in months as he prepared to come home. At the same time, he describes his feelings upon learning the war was over this way: "I never felt more desolate or empty in my life. My meaning was gone, my life was without purpose." This is a fascinating contradiction. Dr. Dannenmaier was clearly damaged by his experiences during the war, and yet, at the time, he found those experiences exhilarating, a true source of meaning and value. Though I can't know, the explanation for this contradiction must lie in the horror of what he experienced. A book that purports to be an honest account of wartime experience should have dealt with this seriously and honestly. The author does not. For example, we never even learn whether the author killed anyone during in the war. Yet, we are regularly treated to detailed discussions of the minutia of daily life on the line. I whole-heartedly recommend the book for what it does well. But I can't help but think that there's only half a book here. But what a half. . . .

Great read!!

The Korean War has sometimes been labelled the "Forgotten War," lying as it does between the titanic conflict of World War II and the contentious struggle in Vietnam. For many Americans today, the term "Korean War" only brings to mind episodes from the television series MASH--a fact deeply resented by veterans of this savage fight that cost almost as many American combat deaths in three years as the Vietnam War did in ten. True, within the past few years, the Korean War has begun to creep back into the public eye. From the belated dedication in the nation's capital of a Korean War memorial to a spate of books and a (most controversial) television series, the conflict is finally attracting attention as a watershed event in its own right. It remains the only occasion since 1945 in

which the armies of two great powers have met on the battlefield. It is filled with military drama (e.g. the destruction of Task Force Smith; the United Nations drive to the Yalu) and an extraordinary cast of characters, such as Harry Truman, Douglas MacArthur, and Matthew Ridgway. Largely missing from the recent literature has been the story of the soldier, sailor, and airman--an absence all the more curious because one of the most prominent trends in recent military history has been a sharpened focus on the human being confronting the chaos of war. It is here that William Dannenmaier's manuscript promises to make a decided contribution. Based largely on letters that Dannenmaier wrote to family members during the conflict, the memoir skillfully weaves these primary documents with the author's later analysis to make an account that is often captivating in its immediacy and thought-provoking in its reflectiveness. A highlight at one end of this spectrum is the author's riveting description of the brutal fight for Outpost Harry. In the broader sphere, the author's observations on the reaction of fighting men to the challenges of combat and to the incredibly harsh environment present the reader with certain eternal verities. The fact that Dannenmaier's comrades came from a society that seemed largely unconcerned with or even dismissive of them --when coupled with the reality that even their own army was all too often indifferent to their fate--adds poignancy to this story. Transparently honest, occasionally touching, and frequently humorous, "The Korean War: A Citizen-Soldier's Reality" is war literature of a high order.

Bravo!!! This is one good book. At one time I read a lot of the 'my personal point of view' vietnam books and this is better than those. They all had a discernable 'hook' or angle which was entertaining but also tried to masquerade as substance and didn't quite pull it off. Dannenmaier's story is substance. Innocents is a simple and straightforward account of a real experience in war and it rings so true.... I am not so much impressed as thankful for the enlightenment of this experience - one I came close to but didn't have. Thanks to the author for writing it and sharing his life with us. It is a heroic thing to do - getting what is inside of you out and letting us all see it.

This book gave me information about my husband's tour of duty in Korea that he never shared with me. I have been lucky to become a friend of the author.

True to his generation, Dannenmaier provides a literary bridge between the selfless hero typified in books like Robert Graves' "Goodbye to All That" and the highly personalized horror of the Vietnam narratives. The steps in his transformation from innocent boy to warrior-killer are marked by reprinted letters sent to his sister, which become steadily shorter and more circumspect as the book

continues, and process of war claims the author. Dannenmaier's story provides a transparent, touching, and often humorous treatise on the ancient subject of war and the young man.

This book is a must-read for anyone interested in history as told through the eyes of an individual. I have always found history texts very difficult to read because they tend to be just a presentation of facts. Mr. Dannenmaier weaves the Korean War and his personal experiences into a well-written book. And there's a lot to be said for comic relief!

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