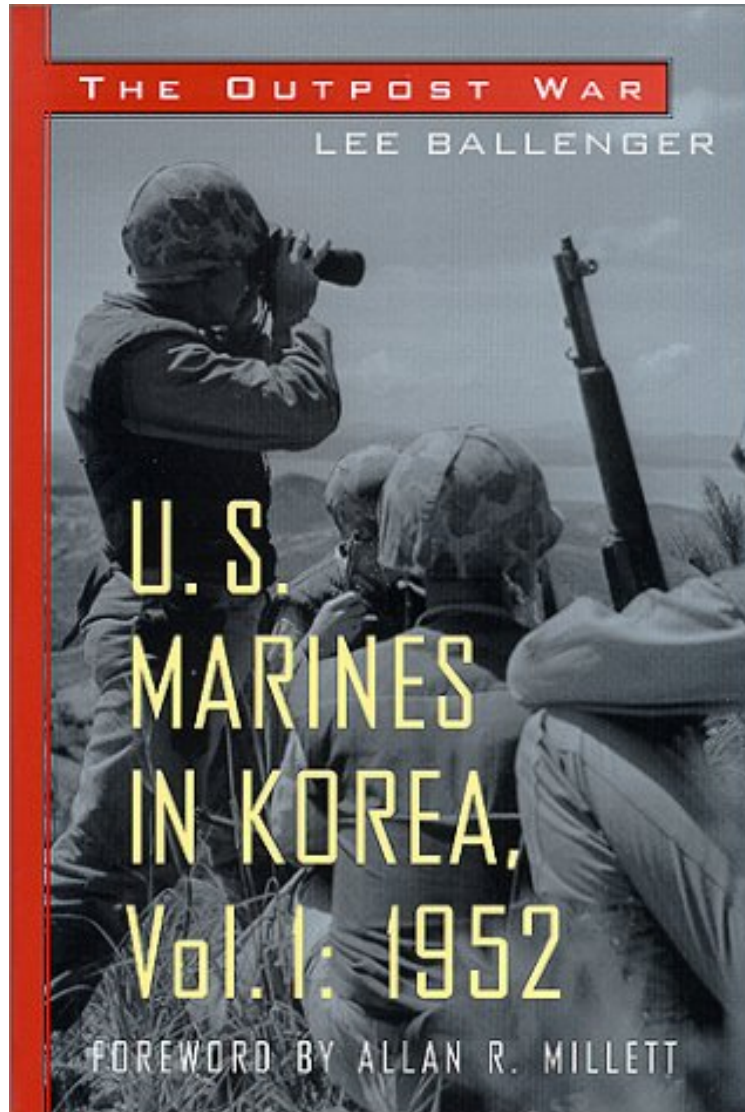


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## The Outpost War: U.S. Marines in Korea, Vol. 1: 1952

*Lee Ballenger*

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Focuses on USMC combat operations during the stalemate phase of the Korean War.

From Publishers Weekly Marine-focused works about the Korean War tend to concentrate on earlier events of that conflict: the Pusan Perimeter, Inchon or the Chosin Reservoir. Yet the war's second half cost almost as many marine casualties. A marine veteran of Korea, Ballenger highlights the First Marine Division's specific difficulties adjusting to static war on the DMZ. His reconstruction of the outpost war, whereby a main line of defense was screened by outpost positions, relies heavily on first-person accounts, mostly from retired officers who were platoon leaders during this period. It describes how the outposts, constructed as buffers, became troublesome centers of the action, but it does not contextualize the fighting. Ballenger stresses, for example, the youth of the enlisted marines, most of whom were 19 or younger, in contrast to the men of the war's earlier years. Did the age of the new replacements have any effect on marine operational performance or fighting power? This and similar questions are not raised. Despite such lapses, Ballenger has taken more pains to cross-check stories than is usual in this genre, and his narrators are painfully, almost brutally, honest in discussing their own behaviors, motives and emotions. The result is some of the best descriptive narratives of small-unit combat to come out of the Korean War, making the book a valuable contribution despite its shortcomings. Illus. not seen by PW. (July) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal In his first book, Ballenger succeeds in presenting a lucid account of the 1st Marine Division in western Korea in 1952, a period of the war (June 1950-July 1953) he describes as a "stalemate" while also pointing out that 40 percent of all Marine casualties occurred after April 1952. Ballenger argues that this period is ignored by historians. This book is actually the first of a two-part set whose second volume will cover 1953 and the final bloody months of the war. The author uses the personal experiences and insights he gained while serving in the 1st Division Reconnaissance Company and the 1st Tank Battalion as well as his battalion command diaries and other sources to write a concise, readable study of what he calls the "Unknown War." The tactics and strategies used by the Marines, Chinese, and Korean (North and South) are described and analyzed. The appendixes provide a detailed list of the many hills, outposts, and military sites relevant to the 1st Division's story. The book is not meant to be a detailed historical study, but it is an intelligent look at one phase of the Korean War. Recommended for public and academic libraries, this will be of special interest to veterans and military history buffs. David Alperstein, Queens Borough P.L., Jamaica, NY Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Booklist A veteran of the events he describes, Ballenger adds usefully to Korean War literature with an account of the 1st Marine Division's actions in 1952. American policy at the time was to neither give nor gain ground while negotiations proceeded, and shortages of manpower and ammunition further limited marine activities. The division had to hold a corps-size front and fight a series of bloody skirmishes and battles for ugly, anonymous hills and outposts while trying to aggressively patrol in the face of superior enemy numbers and sometimes firepower as well as excellent fieldcraft. The book ends up as a tribute to the infantry of both armies, fighting each other, the rugged terrain, and a climate that ranged from subarctic to subtropical. Writing plainly, Ballenger well balances strategic analyses and vivid battle narratives. Readers may look forward to a further volume covering the marines' outpost war in 1953. Roland Green Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved