

2003

No Gun Ri: A Military History of the Korean War Incident

Stephen F. Davis Jr.

Robert L. Bateman

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Davis, Stephen F. Jr. and Bateman, Robert L. (2003) "No Gun Ri: A Military History of the Korean War Incident," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 56 : No. 4 , Article 24.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol56/iss4/24>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

to and jaded by these kinds of exploits, or perhaps *Dark Waters* pulled some of *NR-1*'s punches due to classification considerations. Regardless, the action sections, though worth reading, are not up to the high standards of the rest of the book. Still, Vyborny's insider account of how *NR-1*'s first crews built and operated their ship fully pays back the reader's investment. *Dark Waters* should be on every submariner's bookshelf, even if it tells its extraordinary tale a bit unevenly.

WILLIAM S. MURRAY
Naval War College



Bateman, Robert L. *No Gun Ri: A Military History of the Korean War Incident*. Mechanicsburg, Penna.: Stackpole, 2002. 288pp. \$22.95

On 11 January 2001, Secretary of Defense William Cohen announced that in June 1950, U.S. soldiers "killed or injured an unconfirmed number of Korean refugees . . . in the vicinity of No Gun Ri." This announcement preceded the release of an investigation convened in response to an Associated Press article that documented the massacre of hundreds of Korean civilians by U.S. soldiers under orders. The article eventually earned a Pulitzer Prize for the Associated Press and thrust the story to front-page news.

For nearly fifty years, the No Gun Ri incident languished in the backwaters of military history. Despite understandable Korean interest, few American researchers delved into this difficult period until early 1999, when AP correspondents Charles Hanley and Martha Mendoza uncovered a "smoking gun," a confessed U.S. Army massacre

participant, and broke the story to a readership anxious to hear about U.S. wartime atrocities.

The truth is not so simple, however. According to Bateman, the AP was working with inconsistent or incorrect information and knew their version was questionable before the article was published. Concurrent with the Army's investigation into the incident, Bateman (an experienced infantry officer himself) examined what transpired at No Gun Ri and tried to resolve the discrepancies between what he knew of 7th Cavalry history, the soldiers who were there, and the details of the AP story. From his investigation and his subsequent writings, Bateman has captured important aspects of the military reality of that time, the frustrations associated with presenting unimpeachable history about a fifty-year-old event, and the dangers of a free press run amok.

Bateman's treatise is divided into two major sections: first, a soldier's review of the tactical situation at the end of July 1950 and the military record of the events at No Gun Ri; and second, a less relevant examination of the Associated Press's publication of the original story. The military analysis is generally solid and clearly backed by an infantry soldier's appreciation for the life-and-death challenges that faced young men of the 7th Cavalry in the early days of the war. Bateman relies on U.S. primary sources, extensive interviews, and reconnaissance photographs to debunk many "facts" reported by the AP and a group of former Korean refugees who are now parties to a four-hundred-million-dollar lawsuit against the U.S. government. Unfortunately, Bateman also draws a number of conclusions

(e.g., that communist sympathizers fired at U.S. soldiers from inside a group of civilian refugees) that are supported only by circumstantial evidence. Interestingly, he chose not to refer to Korean primary sources, citing translation challenges and tainted testimony, and used only sources available on this side of the Pacific.

In the second half of the book, Bateman takes issue with the investigative work at the Associated Press and discusses at length his inability to convince the AP of the inconsistencies in its story. While interesting in a voyeuristic sort of way, Bateman's harsh spotlight on the AP does little to further explain what happened at No Gun Ri. Americans, unfortunately, have become inured to journalistic excesses and biased reporting. Not much is added to the story by belaboring the point. Also, Bateman's additional cursory discussions of the current sad state of military-media affairs are out of place in a work of serious military history.

Woven throughout both the AP story and Bateman's book is the strange case of Ed Daily—the "smoking gun." Purportedly an Army officer who was present at No Gun Ri, Daily told his story to Handy and Mendoza and became an instant media sensation. After the story was published, Daily was interviewed by Tom Brokaw, made appearances at veterans' gatherings, and had his picture flashed around the world. He was a fraud. Daily had never been an Army officer. He made his living by fabricating an honorable military career. In February 2002, Daily was fined four

hundred thousand dollars by a federal court for fraudulent combat-related medical claims, and he admitted publicly for the first time that he had never been at No Gun Ri.

Ed Daily's deception and Bateman's conflicting evidence seriously undermine the credibility of the AP story but do not alter one fundamental fact—in the midst of a chaotic tactical withdrawal at the beginning of the Korean conflict, an unspecified number of civilians were fired upon and wounded or killed by U.S. soldiers near a railroad overpass at No Gun Ri. Any serious student of general military history, or Korean military history in particular, will not be surprised to learn that an incident like this occurred. The exact number of casualties is subject to debate but is likely far less than reported by the AP.

In the final analysis, there are four versions of the story: those of the Korean litigants, the Associated Press, the U.S. Army, and Bob Bateman. It is unlikely that we will ever know which of them is correct. Time, fog, fading memories, inadequate Army record keeping, and inflated egos have combined to make this event difficult to understand with confidence and clarity. Yet the event, however it occurred, reaffirms how challenging it is to lead troops in the field under fire, and it underscores the difficult task of combat identification during times of extraordinary stress.

STEPHEN F. DAVIS, JR.
Commander, U.S. Navy
Federal Executive Fellow
Center for Strategic and International Studies
Washington, D.C.