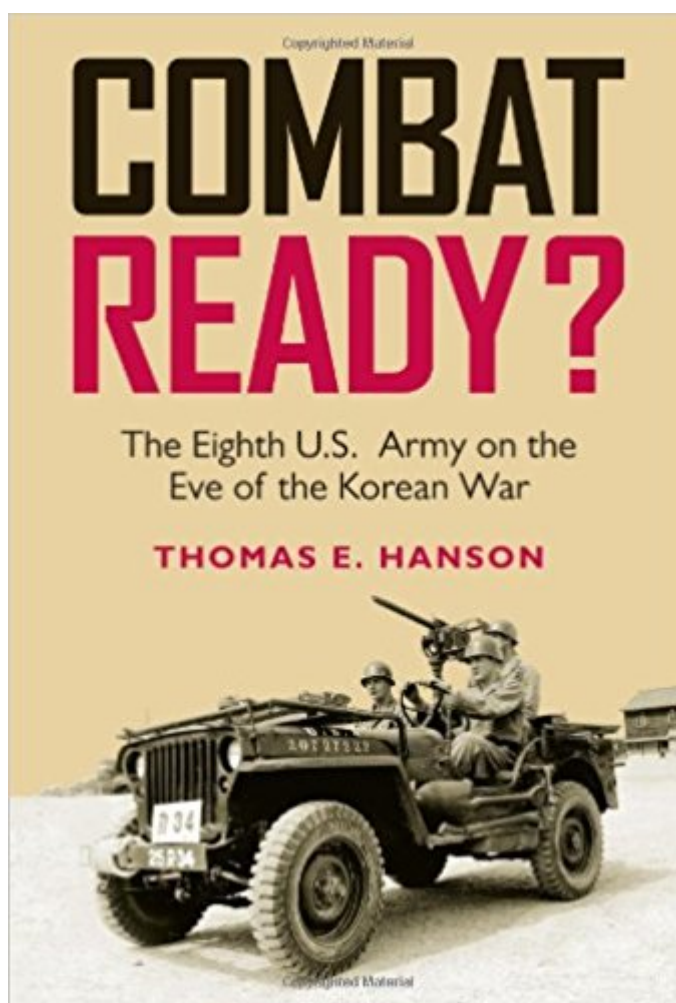


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# Combat Ready?: The Eighth U.S. Army On The Eve Of The Korean War (Williams-Ford Texas A&M University Military History Series)



## Synopsis

In the decades since the "forgotten war" in Korea, conventional wisdom has held that the Eighth Army consisted largely of poorly trained, undisciplined troops who fled in terror from the onslaught of the Communist forces. Now, military historian Thomas E. Hanson argues that the generalizations historians and fellow soldiers have used regarding these troops do little justice to the tens of thousands of soldiers who worked to make themselves and their army ready for war. In Hanson's careful study of combat preparedness in the Eighth Army from 1949 to the outbreak of hostilities in 1950, he concedes that the U.S. soldiers sent to Korea suffered gaps in their professional preparation, from missing and broken equipment to unevenly trained leaders at every level of command. But after a year of progressive, focused, and developmental collective training based largely on the lessons of combat in World War II—these soldiers expected to defeat the Communist enemy. By recognizing the constraints under which the Eighth Army operated, Hanson asserts that scholars and soldiers will be able to discard what Douglas MacArthur called the "pernicious myth" of the Eighth Army's professional, physical, and moral ineffectiveness.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"This case study enhances our understanding of how the U.S. Army in peace time trains and prepares for war. Hanson makes a convincing case for reevaluating the combat readiness of the Eighth Army in 1950. America's shortcoming in the opening months of the Korean War cannot be

blamed simply on occupation soldiers who had gone soft serving in Japan."--G. Kurt Piehler, founding director, Rutgers Oral History Archives of World War II and director of the Center for the Study of War and Society (G. Kurt Piehler Founding Director, Rutgers Oral History archives of World War II)". . . the author has brought together a wealth of previously unexplored sources and documentation to tell a compelling story, one that to a considerable degree refutes the dominant scholarly interpretation of what happened (or didn't happen) to the Eighth Army prior to the outbreak of the Korean War."--Theodore A. Wilson, University of Kansas, author of WW2: Readings on Critical Issues (Theodore A. Wilson University of Kansas) "An admirably coherent and insightful study of the U.S. Eighth Army before it plunged into the maelstrom of the Korean War. Thomas Hanson's history is meticulous, balanced, and highly relevant." • Rick Atkinson, author of *An Army at Dawn* and *The Day of Battle* (Rick Atkinson author of *An Army at Dawn* and *The Day of Battle*) "By digging deep into little-used primary sources, Thomas Hanson makes a compelling argument for overturning the long-standing portrait of the Eighth Army in June 1950 as a poorly trained force softened by the pleasures of occupation duty. This book is revisionism of the best sort and an important contribution to the history of the U.S. Army." • William M. Donnelly, author of *Under Army Orders: The Army National Guard during the Korean War* (William M. Donnelly author of *Under Army Orders: The Army National Guard during the Korean War*) "Hanson overturns the pervasive myth that the U.S. soldiers committed to Korea in the summer of 1950 were occupation troops unfit for combat. Bolstered by extensive research, *Combat Ready* is a most thorough and comprehensive study of the pre-war Army, its training and preparations for war, and its strategic victory over the North Korean forces."--Brian McAllister Linn, professor of history and Claudius M. Easley Jr., Faculty Fellow Department of History (Brian McAllister Linn 2009-08-29) "His readable, well-informed, and thoroughly researched book, a development of his Ohio State University doctoral dissertation, is one of a growing number of detailed, well-documented studies that are expanding our knowledge of the Cold War American military. Hanson provides essential context for anyone who would understand U.S. Army performance in the early months of the Korean War." • Donald W. Boose, Jr., *Journal of Military History* (Donald W. Boose, Jr. *Journal of Military History*) "The book accomplishes the goal and all future works on Korea will have to account for Hanson's conclusions. . . Hanson's conclusions. . . are illuminating and will cause readers to reevaluate their previous knowledge of Korea. . . The author's writing style is straightforward and direct. He questions assumptions and paradigms in a logical, easy-to-follow way. The author is blunt in his assessment and places blame where he sees it. . . a significant and thoughtful analysis. . . Future authors will have to account for

the facts Hanson brings to light. . . His conclusions and examples are applicable today." — LTC Robert Rielly, USA, Retired, Military Review (LTC Robert Rielly, USA, Retired Military Review)

LT. COL. THOMAS E. HANSON, a former instructor in the Department of History at the United States Military Academy at West Point, has served in and commanded units at Panmunjom in the Korean Demilitarized Zone. He currently commands the 2nd Battalion, 353rd Infantry Regiment of the 162nd Infantry Training Brigade in Fort Polk, Louisiana.

Great read. New examination of the long believed assumption the US forces at the start of Korean War were lazy and not trained to the task. Interesting insight into how poor elected leadership and budget constraints cost American lives in 1950.

I bought this book on the recommendation of a friend with similar tastes in military history. As historians, we both prefer facts and in-depth research, especially when an author challenges a long held and firmly believed historical perception. Col. Thomas E. Hanson successfully challenges the notion that the American soldiers who deployed to Korea in July 1950 were soft, pampered, and ill-trained. As a result of Hanson's thorough research and clear prose, I no longer believe in that particular thesis, so eloquently and dramatically described in T. R. Fehrenbach's "This Kind of War: A Study in Unpreparedness." Although Hanson does not delve into the opening battles in Korea, as his book is confined to training conducted by American occupation troops in Japan before the outbreak of war, I now believe that faulty tactical dispositions, systemic logistical problems arising from the Truman administration's parsimonious allocation of military expenditures for the Army, and a gross misunderstanding of the enemy they faced, contributed to the debacles such as Task Force Smith and the defeat of the 24th Infantry Division at Taejon. However, as Hanson sometimes alludes to, not all American units did poorly in the opening phase of the Korean war. Also examined in this account, but not in great detail, are the personnel policies of a post-war US Army that included shortened command tours, placing non-infantry officers in charge of infantry units, and accepting greater than normal personnel turnover. Hanson rightfully identifies the Army Chief of Staff, GEN J. Lawton Collins, as contributing to the systemic unpreparedness that emerged in the harsh light of combat during the Summer of 1950. On a cautionary note, this book is not written for someone with a hankering for drama or a cursory interest in the U.S. Army. It talks mainly about training and personnel policy, topics that would resonate more with historians having considerable

military background or long standing interest in those specific topics. That said, if you are interested in a new interpretation of the opening days of the Korean War, pick up Hanson's book.

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