



Hello and welcome to the spring meetings of The Historians! For those of you who are new to our group, do not let the 700 pages of David Halberstam's The Coldest Winter intimidate you. We read two 800 page books in the fall, and everyone survived! Here are a few survival tips for new members. First, there is not going to be test. Do not worry if you do not have time to complete the book before our meeting. Feel free to look up information on the Korean War to familiarize yourself with the important names and events. This will help you follow the discussion for the sections that you did not get a chance to read. For those of you who are students of literature, I need to let you in on the secret of reading history books. History readers often skim as we read for information or dip in and out of the sections we find the most interesting. All of you should feel free to do the same.

I am hoping that once you begin the book, you will see why David Halberstam was so highly regarded as a journalist and as an historian. He loved to interview people and had a real gift for eliciting the telling story from those he interviewed. The Coldest Winter is a long book because Halberstam felt strongly that the veterans of Korea needed their own book. He also worried that they were dying before anyone got their stories into writing. His book was meant to commemorate the individual soldiers and to bring

the Korean War veterans the honor and respect they deserved. Paul McGee's story ends the book and serves as a model for the men who fought in Korea. McGee talks about the men he fought with and his own thoughts fifty years after the war. Halberstam writes, "[These men] did not need words to bind them together; their deeds were the requisite bond. All in all, [McGee] thought, he was glad he had gone and fought there. It was a job to do, nothing more, nothing less, and when you thought about it, there had not been a lot of choice."

As you read, remember the stories and take note of the ones that mean the most to you. What do you learn about the war? The descriptions of the terrain and the unbelievable hardships of fighting in subzero temperatures give me a much clearer idea of how different this war was from fighting in Europe or the Pacific. Halberstam's critics think he is too hard on MacArthur. What do you think? Some critics think this book is too influenced by Halberstam's experiences in the Vietnam War and by the Iraq War being fought as he is writing. Halberstam's wife says this is not true, and that Halberstam worked hard to avoid being influenced by other wars as he did not want to trivialize the sacrifices of the men in Korea by making them a metaphor for other wars. That being said, all agree that Halberstam's sympathies were always with the men in the field and not with the commanders far away. What do you think?

I hope you enjoy the book. Halberstam is a wonderful story teller as well as a careful historian/journalist. I look forward to talking with you about The Coldest Winter when we meet on Tuesday, February 7 at 6:30. See you there!

Donna McBride