

Grey, Jeffrey. *The Commonwealth armies and the Korean War, An alliance study*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988.

In recent years there has been a minor revival of interest in the Korean War, with the publication of books such as: Roy Flint, *The tragic flaw: MacArthur, the joint chiefs and the Korean War* (1985); Peter Lowe, *The Origins of the Korean War* (1986); Max Hastings, *The Korean War* (1987); Clay Blair, *The forgotten war: America in Korea* (1987); and James Cotton, *The Korean War in history* (1989). Dr. Jeffrey Grey, a lecturer in the Department of History of the University College, Australian Defence Force Academy, has made a fine contribution to that list in a book that covers substantial new ground. The purpose of the book, which is one of the Manchester University Press's series "War, Armed Forces and Society", is twofold: to show the pattern of relations between the Commonwealth forces within the context of the Korean War; and through that study make comment about the problems of coalition warfare in general.

The first two chapters of the book provide the background. The first is a useful essay on the problems of coalition warfare, and in the second is a brief overview of the war, highlighting the difficulties faced by the United Nations Command in managing the forces of the various non-Commonwealth armies involved.

After this background the book reverts to a largely chronological approach as the story unfolds, from the decision of the Commonwealth countries to commit forces, through the resolution of the problems of command and control, the early problems of co-operation in Korea, the formation of the 1st Commonwealth Division in July 1951, the command and administration of the Division, and finally the Division's role as part of the UN forces. The penultimate chapter examines the financial and logistic aspects of maintaining the Commonwealth forces in Korea.

Grey emphasises the fact that perhaps the key problem in coalition warfare revolves around command. In this respect the role of the Australian commander, Lieutenant-General Sir Horace Robertson, has previously not been given the attention that clearly it deserved. In 1946 he was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force (BCOF) in Japan, responsible to the British, Australian, New Zealand and Indian chiefs of staff through a body known as the "Joint Chiefs of Staff in Australia". By the time of the outbreak of the Korean War the BCOF had been reduced to little more than an Australian battalion, but Robertson had the command infrastructure available that could be readily adapted to provide administrative support for the Commonwealth forces deployed to Korea.

Robertson's problems throw interesting light on British attitudes. Had BCOF been a wartime operational command it is unlikely that the British would have tolerated an Australian commander, and during the late 1940s the British government had tried to undermine his authority as Commander-in-Chief BCOF. Vain, arrogant and egotistical, Robertson was a good target for British criticism, but he was also highly capable and he insisted from the start

that the existing BCOF organisation could and should provide the back-up for Commonwealth forces in the area. He realised that the thinly-stretched American system did not have the capacity to support the Commonwealth, and in the space of three months his organisation had been transformed from a force of one battalion and supporting services readying itself to return to Australia, to an expanding base organisation supporting one brigade in the field, preparing to support a second, and planning to support a third should it be despatched from Canada. As Commander-in-Chief British Commonwealth Forces Korea he maintained communication with General MacArthur and kept in touch with the Commonwealth governments.

Like the American Army, the Commonwealth armies were ill-prepared for war, and perhaps even worse off in terms of heavy equipment. They therefore had to rely on the Americans for combat support and transport and this presented problems for both the Americans and the Commonwealth forces during the early fighting in Korea. Nonetheless the Commonwealth forces fought exceptionally well in the early battles, with the respective commanders carrying an additional burden of the knowledge that their governments would not tolerate heavy losses. For example, the British commander of the 27th Brigade ordered the 3rd Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment, to withdraw after its successful defence at Kapyong because he was "aware that he was responsible to the Australian government for the safety of its battalion, and that searching questions would be asked if the only Australian ground force in Korea was wiped out".

The 1st Commonwealth Division was a unique organisation, comprising British, Canadian and Australian brigades and including New Zealand artillery. Fortunately the Commonwealth forces all used similar equipment and procedures, but the Division came under the command of a United States corps. As Grey demonstrates, there were problems a plenty in administering such a force.

The Commonwealth involvement in Korea demonstrated three important lessons. Firstly, disagreements or lack of common purpose in matters of common defence will be reflected in the performance of the forces concerned. Secondly, lack of preparedness to meet an emergency will make the forces of the smaller partners in a coalition even more reliant upon the major force in a theatre, increasing the difficulties on the battlefield. And finally, even allied forces operating with the benefit of common doctrinal and organisational assumptions and a high level of standardisation will experience friction and disunity. Given the importance of the NATO alliance to western security, these lessons and the continuing problem of coalition warfare obviously warrants constant attention.

Grey's book is the result of assiduous research in five countries, and he has pieced together a valuable and important perspective on this often forgotten, but nonetheless major war. Scholarly and analytical, the book does not attempt to be a comprehensive history of the Commonwealth commitment to Korea. It is, however, a valuable study of the very real

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problems likely to be faced by most western countries if they were to be involved in an alliance war in the future.

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