



# **The Marines of Autumn: A Novel of the Korean War**

*James Brady*

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One"MacArthur will be sprinting north. You know how he is; you know about the ego." The Marines, hard men and realists, had never heard of the Chosin Reservoir, but they did not believe the war was over. Not yet. Nor did they truly trust MacArthur. When they "liberated" (a headline writer's word no Marine ever used) Seoul, the South Korean capital, MacArthur flew in for ceremonies with that old fart Syngman Rhee, accompanied by honor guards of spit-and-polish South Korean troops who had run away and hadn't fought. MacArthur and President Rhee accepted the city as explorers returning from the South Pole once had received the keys of New York from Mayor La Guardia. It was all bullshit. In the two or three days after MacArthur and Rhee took the salute, another two hundred Marines were killed in the house-to-house fighting that continued after Seoul was "liberated." Within a few weeks MacArthur would be announcing that "the boys," his phrase, might be "home for Christmas." In the early autumn of 1950 MacArthur's image had rarely shone as brightly. At his vice-regal headquarters in Tokyo he could look back on the extraordinary events of September, when a battered American and South Korean army pulled itself together at Pusan, swept ashore at Inchon, recaptured Seoul, and burst north to the Thirty-eighth Parallel toward victory. MacArthur had never gone back to America after defeating the Japanese, and if he could win this new war swiftly, he would at last come home and on a giddy wave of popularity. The Chicago Tribune and the Hearst papers were already pushing his cause for the 1952 Republican nomination for president. If he could beat out colorless Senator Taft and the politically equivocal, naive Eisenhower, well, who knew? But he had to win this latest war first, and quickly, settling the affair before winter closed down. Even the general, with a solemn regard for his own divinity, knew you could not fight a modern war in the mountains during a north Asian winter. As his troops crossed the Parallel into North Korea there were warnings, diplomatic and military, that Communist China would not idly permit its Korean ally to be crushed or tolerate a UN, largely American, army installed on China's border at the Yalu River. MacArthur, out of pride or ambition (who knew which dominated?), ignored the warnings and at the end of September divided his triumphant army and ordered it to push rapidly north, one column to the east, the other column to the west of a spine of mountains through which there were no roads, only trails and footpaths. He did not know that in what was then called Peking, on October 4, Mao Tse-tung ordered Chinese Communist Forces (CCF) to intervene, secretly at first, filtering across the Yalu by night and hiding in the North Korean hills until sufficient force had built up, out of sight of marauding American planes (each man carried a sort of bedsheet as camouflage in the snow), to fall upon and destroy MacArthur's two armies fatally divided by mountains. There were rules about splitting your army in two like this, with mountains or swamps or deserts separating one column from the other. But Douglas MacArthur or, "The General," as Jean MacArthur invariably called her husband, was an officer whose legend was founded on broken rules. The First Marine Division was to spearhead the eastern half of the UN army, what was called X Corps, in its sprint to the Yalu River and to China. Perhaps Omar Bradley should have spoken up. Later (but only later) he said of MacArthur's plan to divide the army, "To me it doesn't make sense the enemy himself could not have concocted a more diabolical scheme." Bradley was chairman of the Joint Chiefs. Joe Collins, "Lightning Joe," admitted he was "worried." He was army Chief of Staff. But as Matt Ridgway said later: "No one was questioning the judgment of the man who had just worked a military miracle," at Inchon, w

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