Martin Russ's controversial book Breakout: The Chosin Reservoir Campaign, Korea 1950 tells the riveting story of how 12,000 Army personnel and Marines fought their way out of an encirclement by more than 60,000 Chinese soldiers. A Marine wounded in combat during the Korean War, Russ writes with a passion for the men who endured freezing temperatures and scaled treacherous mountains while continuing to strike the enemy as they advanced toward safety. While many accounts of modern war bog readers down in a morass of military and administrative details, Russ's history so clearly distinguishes the various units, locations, and personalities that shaped the campaign that it could easily be compared with the finest novels of battle, including Michael Shaara's The Killer Angels. Expertly moving between American, Chinese, and Korean points of view, Russ argues that the Marines were trapped at Chosin because of the arrogance of Douglas MacArthur, the incompetence of the U.S. Army, and the disciplined planning of the Chinese generals. Celebrated for his brilliant war memoir, The Last Parallel, Russ has provoked criticism for his tendency in Breakout to disparage the U.S. Army. However, his quotations of numerous dispatches showing Marine commanders concern about advancing into the Chosin area, as well as his consistent portrayal of Army officers' ineptitude, lend credence to his argument that it was the particular esprit de corps of the Marines that prevented the disintegration of American forces in the freezing wastes of North Korea. --James Highfill

My Personal Review:
Let me start out by saying that I have nothing but the highest respect for the United States Marine Corps. Not only for what they accomplished during the retreat from Chosin in particular, but for all the Corps has accomplished during its long and honorable history.
However, if one were to take Russ's book at face value, the Marines did it all alone with no help whatsoever. This is just not the case, as any real military historian of the campaign will attest. His anti-Army rhetoric detracts from the main story he is trying to tell, that of the Marine exploits during the retreat. Had he stuck to just the story of the Corps, the whole book would be somewhat more credible. As it is, his comments about the conduct of the army troops at the reservoir and in other areas show an appalling lack of research. His list of sources, ironically, lists books that directly contradict the anti-Army stories he likes to tell. I can only assume that Russ needed the list to try to impress his readers that he did some form of research. Let's face it, the definitive work on the Campaign is THE CHOSIN RESERVOIR CAMPAIGN, Vol. 3 of U.S. Marine Operations in Korea. Even here, Russ distorts what positive information that was presented on Army operations. He sure used all the positive information on the Marines, however.

The one glaring example of the many distortions on the Army relates to Company D, 10th Combat Engineers (Third Infantry Division) which was the largest single Army unit in the battle for East Hill. It comprised a total of 77 GIs and 90 ROK troops. Russ states that a Marine Major came upon Company D's encampment and found only one guard outside the tents, a Private Franklin Kestner. FACT. Franklin states that the whole Company was outside preparing for a work detail. Russ further states that the Marine Major was disgusted as the Engineers had not a single radio nor even one machine gun. FACT. Every account (MARINE OPERATIONS IN KOREA, CHOSIN, COMBAT SUPPORT IN KOREA and others) show that Company D had four 50 and five 30 caliber machine guns. As stated by Lt. Rosen and Private Kestner the unit had its full compliment of radios. Russ states that during the battle GIs broke and were fleeing for their lives down the slopes. FACT. The only troops that seemed to disappear were the ROK troops. The Engineer troops fell back 250 yards and held fast under the inspired command of both Captain Kulbes and Lt. Rosen. In the morning, there were some 400 dead enemy troops in front of the Engineer position. Captain Kulbes and Lt. Rosen were awarded Silver Stars for their leadership and Company D was awarded a Presidential Unit Citation from the Department of the Navy for their part in the action on East Hill. What is so ironic is that Kulbes, Rosen, and Kestner were all available for interviews should Russ really have wanted to be objective. But then they were Army. Even the books Russ lists as references refute his commentary on Company D. Again, obviously he did little or no research on any information presented on the Army units. His distortion of the facts is an insult to the ten brave infantrymen of Company D who gave their lives that night.

There is no need to comment on Russ's unjustified and ill-informed accusations on the conduct of Task Force Faith and General Walker and the 8th Army. Suffice it to say that Russ and his myopic view of the mission of the 10th Corps shows again his lack of objectivity and research. It is the considered opinion of most military experts that had not the Chinese 80th Division been diverted to attack the Army's 31st RCT, the Marines might not have been able to hold Hagaru-ri. This could have doomed the 1st Marine Division.
In conclusion, Russ tells a nice folksy story about the Marine retreat. He did not, however, have to spend useless time vilifying the Army. I was very proud to have served in Combat during the Korea Conflict as a member of the Army. We fought just as hard and bled just as freely and died just as bravely as any Marine.

For More 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price:

Breakout: The Chosin Reservoir Campaign, Korea 1950 by Martin Russ - 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price!