

THE FOUR DEUCES

"This story was written to let you know how one very young, very scared Marine saw his very first war and how he reacted to the killing and mayhem of it. I am well aware that my view of the Korean War has no historical importance. Still, it is my view, and I want to share it with you."

BOOK REVIEW

The Four Deuces: A Korean War Story

Author: C.S. Crawford

Publisher: **A Presidio Press Book**
The Random House Ballantine Publishing Group
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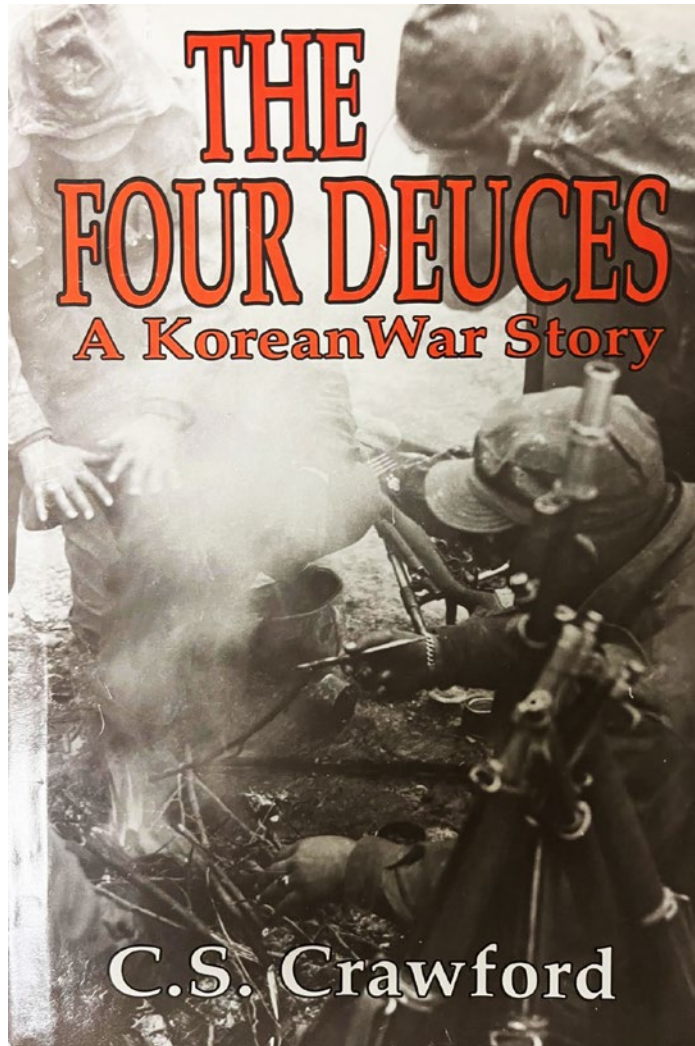
Review by: Adam Walker, Staff Writer | USMC

These powerful lines from the Prologue of *The Four Deuces – A Korean War Story* by C.S. Crawford provide a glimpse into what has been referred to as *The Forgotten War*. Crawford was a young Marine in 1951, when he served in Korea and his book was written in 1989. The thirty-eight years in between provided maturity and perspective, without which he could not have told his story as effectively.

Crawford grew up during WWII and like many boys looked upon those veterans with admiration. He enlisted in the Marines "after a lifetime of waiting to be old enough to join." The adventurous young man wanted to see action and faced discouragement when his numerous requests for transfer were rejected. Crawford was serving as a switchboard operator and a telephone central repair man. He had a bad attitude but received some surprising and influential mentorship from an old salt after a blunder on watch one night. Crawford "got with the program" and soon received orders to Korea.

He stated "I viewed war as an adventure, it never occurred that I might get killed" when reflecting on the optimism of youth. Later the sage penned this book and said, "Wars are fought by young men who had very little experience in the business." Sober passages like this appear throughout the book and on many occasions caused me to stop, reflect, and absorb the lesson.

Arriving in Korea an old Staff Non-Commissioned Officer he refers to as "the Funny Gunny" took him under his wing. Late one night before heading up the mountain to the front lines they talked. Crawford said "For the second time a senior Staff NCO had taken the time to notice me, to talk to me one-on-one, to teach me. Tired as I was, I didn't want the moment to end."



"Powerful!
AT EASE! Veterans Magazine highly recommends *The Four Deuces: A Korean War Story*. C.S. Crawford's humility, authenticity, and powerful storytelling bring laughter and tears while honoring those with whom he served.

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Crawford was soon promoted to Sergeant and took on the role of a Forward Observer for the Four Deuces (slang for the 4.2-inch chemical mortar company). He had "all the confidence in the world and most of the ignorance too" serving in the trenches and bunkers with the infantry. "Living in 25 to 35 degrees below zero was hardship enough, never mind having to die in it because the enemy is shooting at you."

Crawford lost many friends and leaders in combat. The death of fellow Marines, even ones he didn't know deeply affected him. Tears came to my eyes when I read "I thought this is wrong, to die and not have someone know your name" when a young replacement was killed. Likewise, a staff officer came to the front lines with his shiny rank visible and was killed in a mortar attack. In anger, grief, and frustration Crawford responded "All the while I kept looking at him and thinking, you fool wearing rank. What do you want someone to salute you or something? Then all of a sudden, I was saluting him and saying goodbye the best way I knew how, even if I didn't know his name, just a Major." The book is peppered with these heart-wringing vignettes. At times it is a hard read, yet at the same time, Crawford honors the memories of these brave men in the telling of their stories.

When coming off the line he tells the reader "It was going to drop below zero that night on the ride back in the truck, that was ok with me, I needed the cold. I needed it to get so cold that all I would be able to think about was the cold."

"I would always remember my friends and their memory would ever haunt me."

As all veterans know, life in the military brings both laughter and tears. We are fortunate that Crawford is balanced in this regard. He tells of a Marine cook impersonating an officer to swindle supplies from the Army so he can prepare a Thanksgiving meal for the guys. In another episode the Marines trade C-ration cocoa to the Aussies for some rum, only to find out they each tried to outfox the other.

We hear detailed descriptions of the men he served with, colorful characters, some of whom never came home. There's a tough and compassionate nurse tending to him on the hospital ship when he was wounded. Crawford reminded her of a

brother killed in Iwo Jima in the preceding war. When Crawford returned to the front lines before fully recovered, she recognized the same fighting spirit in this gyrene.

At one point Crawford is pulled off the mountain for a few weeks to attend NCO School. This course was taught by hardened veterans and consisted of combat skills required of an NCO in that war. The course was held a mere two miles from the DMZ. My jaw dropped when I learned their culminating exercise was a reconnaissance patrol on an enemy position.

The following passage captures much of Crawford's thoughts and emotions:

"Walking off the hill pausing where Red, Tom, Gunny, and the cook had each been killed, remembering what Red said 'Man was civilized when he remembered his yesterdays and dreamed of his tomorrows, who could make friends and hold onto them' Right then as far as I was concerned, I was through remembering my yesterdays and I sure didn't want to dream anything about what my tomorrows might hold. I thought about Red again and knew that dreams of tomorrow do not always come true. I guessed it was ok though to hold onto a friend, if only in memory."

C.S. Crawford's humility, authenticity, and powerful storytelling bring laughter and tears while honoring those with whom he served.

"IN THE END, WE WILL REMEMBER NOT THE WORDS OF
OUR ENEMIES, BUT THE SILENCE OF OUR FRIENDS."

— MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.



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