



*This page and the next, street fighting in Seoul as captured by Life magazine photographer David Douglas Duncan.*





on red-eyed, soot-faced Marines.

Given these circumstances, it is not surprising that the Marines greeted with hoots of derision the communique by General Almond that Seoul had been liberated at 1400 the previous afternoon, the 25th of September. "Three months to the day after the North Koreans launched their surprise attack south of the 38th Parallel," the message proclaimed, "the combat troops of X Corps recaptured the capital city of Seoul." To their astonishment, the Marines learned that their corps commander considered the military defenses of Seoul to be broken. "The enemy is fleeing the city to the northeast," the communique concluded. An Associated Press correspondent reflected the infantry's skepticism: "If the city had been liberated, the remaining North Koreans did not know it."

In truth the Marines and soldiers would still be fighting for full possession of the capital 48 hours past General Almond's announced liberation date, but the issue was insignificant. The troops viewed the battle from purely a tactical perspective; their corps commander sensed the political ramifications. Of far greater significance at this point was the fact that five infantry regiments with a total lack of experience waging coalition warfare with combined arms in an enormous urban center were nevertheless prevailing against a well-armed, disciplined enemy. General MacArthur's visionary stroke at Inchon had succeeded in investing the city of Seoul in just 11 days. In view of the allies' disheartening performance in the Korean War to date, MacArthur, and Almond, had earned the right to boast.

Further, although the Marines

might not like to admit it, General Almond was essentially correct in his flash message the night of the 25th—the main body of the North Korean defenders, the remnants of a division, was indeed retreating north. What surprised all components of X Corps was the NKPA decision to expend the equivalent of an armored brigade in suicidal night attacks and die-hard defense of the main barricades to keep the Americans ensnared in the city.

Analyzing the NKPA decision to evacuate the main body of their defenders from Seoul is always risky, but there is evidence that the pullback resulted as much from their surprise at the unexpected crossing of the 32d Infantry and the 17th ROK Infantry from the southeast on the 25th—paired with the rapid advance of the 7th Marines, threatening the northern escape routes—as from the steady but predictable advance of the 5th and 1st Marines. Regardless, it was obvious to Almond and O. P. Smith that seizing such a mammoth objective as Seoul would require uncommon teamwork among Services, nations, and combat arms. Allied teamwork throughout the night attacks of 25-26 September had proven exemplary.

The Marines employed Corsairs and artillery to soften the barricades, then switched to 4.2-inch and 81mm mortars. The assault companies delivered machine gun and rocket fire on the fortifications to cover the deliberate minesweeping operations by combat engineers. Then came the M-26 Pershing tanks, often with other tanks modified as flamethrowers or bulldozers. On the heels of the tanks came the infantry with fixed bayonets. The process was unavoidably time-consuming—each barricade required 45-60 minutes to overrun—and each of these intermediate objectives took its toll

in Marine and civilian casualties. The city smoked and burned.

As Lieutenant Colonel Jack Hawkins' 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, fought its way clear of the railroad yards and entered a parallel thoroughfare his riflemen stared in horror at the rampant destruction. As it appeared to Private First Class Morgan Brainard, the scene was one of "great gaping skeletons of blackened buildings with their windows blown out...telephone wires hanging down loosely from their drunken, leaning poles; glass and bricks everywhere; literally a town shot to hell."

Not all the fighting took place around the barricaded intersections. There were plenty of other NKPA soldiers holed up in the buildings and rooftops. Many of these soldiers became the prey of Marine scout-sniper teams, some armed with old Springfield '03 bolt action rifles fitted with scopes, others favoring the much newer M1-C semi-automatic rifles, match-conditioned weapons graced with cheek pads, flash suppressors, leather slings, and 2.2x telescopic sights. The snipers often worked in teams of two. One man used binoculars or a spotting scope to find targets for the shooter.

Many of the buildings in the city center were multi-story, and, according to Private First Class Brainard, "it meant going up the stairs and kicking open the doors of each room, and searching the balconies and backyard gardens as well." Often the Marines had to fight their way through the buildings, smashing their way through the walls like Smedley Butler's Marines in Vera Cruz in 1914.

Colonel Puller led his regiment from very near the forward elements. On this day he dismounted from his jeep and stalked up Ma Po Boulevard shortly behind Lieutenant Colonel Sutter's 2d

## Combat Engineers in the Seoul Campaign

Among the many unsung heroes who provided ongoing combat support to the infantry regiments of the 1st Marine Division in the recapture of Seoul were the dauntless practitioners of Lieutenant Colonel John H. Partridge's 1st Engineer Battalion. As did the division as a whole, the engineers represented an amalgam of World War II veterans, new recruits, and a spirited group of reservists, including members of the 3d Engineer Company, United States Marine Corps Reserve, from Phoenix, Arizona.

Fortunately, the Inchon landing caught the NKPA forces in the region off guard, and the battalion had time to shake itself down in non-urgent missions before breaking into small units to tackle enemy minefields. The engineers at first cleared beach exits and assembly areas in the Inchon area, then moved out to help reconnoiter the roads leading east to Seoul. Of immediate concern to Major General Oliver P. Smith and his operations officer, Colonel Alpha L. Bowser, Jr., was whether the numerous bridges along the highways and secondary roads were sturdy enough to support the Marines' new M-26 Pershing tank with its 46 tons of combat-loaded weight.

The Marines encountered the first serious NKPA minefields (both antitank and anti-personnel) in the vicinity of Kimpo Airfield. The subsequent arrival of highly-trained, first-line North Korean reinforcements in defensive positions guarding the approaches to Seoul led to minefields of increasing size and sophistication. Soviet Red Army advisors had trained the NKPA in mine warfare, and many of the mines encountered by the

Marines were made in Russia. These mines slowed the advance of the 1st Marine Division as it reached the outer defenses of Seoul along the Kalchon west of Yongdungpo or the avenues of approach to Hill 296 and its many subordinate peaks and ridgelines. Partridge's engineer teams performed their high-stress mine-clearing missions with progressive efficiency. This helped sustain the division's momentum and limited the time available to the enemy to more fully develop defensive positions within the city.

In Seoul, the Marines encountered barricaded roadblocks every 200 to 300 yards along the main boulevards. The North Koreans seeded most approaches with mines. The Marines formulated the necessary teamwork on the spot. The rifle company commander would shower the obstacle with fire, including smoke or white phosphorus mortar shells. Under this cover the engineer squad would hustle forward to clear the mines. Behind them would come the tanks, followed by the infantry. It was dangerous, often costly work. Sometimes a mine would detonate among the engineers. Sometimes they would miss a string and a tank would be lost. Most often, however, this painstaking process worked. Each barricade took an average of 45 minutes to clear. Utilizing this well-coordinated and increasingly proficient approach, the infantry battalions of the 1st Marines advanced an average of 1,200 yards each day—a small gain on a map, but an inexorable advance to the North Koreans.

The 1st Engineers provided another exceptional service to the division in the Seoul campaign—river cross-

Gen Oliver P. Smith Collection, Marine Corps Research Center



ing. The Han was a broad tidal river, and its few bridges had been blown up during the first week of the war. The Marines had amphibian tractors and DUKWs on hand to transport riflemen and small vehicles across against the current, but the campaign would never succeed without the means of ferrying, first, tanks and artillery, then heavy trucks and trailers. Major General Edward A. Almond, USA, commanding X Corps, had proven disingenuous in his repeated assurances that heavy bridging material would arrive in plenty of time to support the Marines' crossing in force. "General Almond promises bridge material," General O. P. Smith recorded in his journal. "This is an empty promise."

Thinking ahead, and acting on his own initiative, Lieutenant Colonel Partridge had obtained a pair of 50-ton pontoons in San Diego and had zealously protected them from the enraged embarkation officer who had to somehow load these unwelcome monsters on ships already stuffed with "essential" combat cargo. The pontoons proved priceless. Partridge had at least one sec-

tion on hand to support the crossing of the 5th Marines at Haengju on 20 September. Lieutenant Colonel Henry P. Crowe's 1st Shore Party Battalion quickly established a smooth functioning ferry service, doubling their productivity with the arrival of Partridge's second pontoon. Here the 7th Marines crossed, as well as the company of M-26 tanks needed so direly by Colonel Puller in his first full day of street fighting in Seoul. General Almond's bridging material arrived in time to support the crossing of General MacArthur's official party as they arrived in Seoul on 29 September.

Greater glories awaited the 1st Engineer Battalion in the forthcoming Chosin Reservoir campaign, where they cleared an expeditionary airfield at Hagaru-ri and assembled the air-dropped Treadway Bridge in Funchilin Pass below Koto-ri, but their yeoman performance in close support of the 1st Marine Division's assault on Seoul set a standard of combined arms operations and greatly facilitated the timely recapture of the capital.

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Battalion, 1st Marines, as it clawed its way along each city block. Sergeant Orville Jones, Puller's hand-picked driver throughout 1950-55, followed his colonel in the jeep, a short distance to the rear. Sometimes the Marines fighting door-to-door along the street would be appalled to see Chesty Puller walking fully exposed and abreast of the action, Jones recalled. "Holy Jeez, they would yell to each other—'Don't let Chesty get ahead of us—move it!'"

Yet even the famously aggressive Chesty Puller could not expedite the methodical reduction of the barricades. Puller admitted, "progress was agonizingly slow." Said the engineer Captain Nicholas A. Canzona: "It was a dirty, frustrating fight every yard of the way."

Army Lieutenant Robert L. Strickland, a World War II veteran now assigned as a cameraman for X Corps, got caught up in the street fighting. He sought shelter in an open courtyard behind a burning building, but the enemy fire came from all directions. "We got so much fire of all kinds that I lost count," he said. "I have seen

a lot of men get hit both in this war and in World War II, but I think I have never seen so many get hit so fast in such a small area."

David Douglas Duncan, veteran Marine and extraordinary combat photographer for *Life* magazine, accompanied the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, during their advance through the rail yards towards the station. Describing the action in his subsequent photo book *This is War*, Duncan highlighted the timely arrival of Marine Pershing tanks that "growled up across the railroad tracks, into the plaza—and met the enemy fire head on." Then, Duncan continued: "The tanks traded round for round with the heavily-armed, barricaded enemy—and chunks of armor and bits of barricade were blown high into the air. They were killing themselves at point-blank range."

Private First Class Brainard of Company A, 1st Marines, described a barricade that had just been demolished by a pair of M-26 Pershing tanks:

We pass by the barricade which had been constructed

with large-sized rice bags . . . and also with odd bits of furniture, such as tables, chairs, and wooden doors, all piled up together. There were about ten dead gooks sprawled in and around the obstruction, and the blackened antitank gun was tipped over on its side with lots of unused shells scattered around it.

The 1st and 5th Marines were now converging close enough that Colonel Puller's men could clearly see Lieutenant Colonel Murray's troops still fighting to clear the final eastern finger of Hill 296, the ridge that extended into the heart of Seoul. Certain riflemen in 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, spoke admiringly of the 5th Marines being "once more on top of the highest hill in the local vicinity—born billy goats."

The 5th Marines may have appreciated the compliment, but by 26 September they were sick and tired of the steep northwest approaches and the stubbornly defending remnants of the 25th



Photo by Frank Noel, Associated Press

*While the Pershing tank "Dead Eye Dick" advances beyond a captured North Korean barricade, a Marine sniper team waits for the 45mm antitank rounds to abate before moving into new firing positions.*

*NKPA Brigade. Captain Robert A. McMullen's Company I, the men who had spearheaded Lieutenant Colonel Taplett's crossing of the Han back at Haengju and earned the praise of General Almond by their double envelopment of Hill 125, would again be in the spotlight on the 26th. Taplett assigned McMullen the mission of sweeping the eastern terminus of the huge lower spur of Hill 296 that extended very near the major intersection of the Kaesong-Seoul highway and Ma Po Boulevard. Ahead, less than a mile to the northeast lay Government House. And not far beyond the palace was the boundary between the 1st and 7th Marines. By design, Murray's regiment, which had sustained the highest casualties the preceding week, was close to being pinched out and assigned a reserve role.*

*A brief helping hand from a Marine amid a day of great terror for the civilians—high explosives, burning buildings,*

*downed power lines, and scattered families.*

Photo by David Douglas Duncan



## Private First Class Eugene A. Obregon

**B**orn in November 1930, Private First Class Obregon enlisted in the Marine Corps in June 1948. Assigned to the 5th Marines, he was part of the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade, which was rushed to Korea in August 1950. He participated in the bloody battles at the Naktong River—crucial victories, which helped save the Pusan Perimeter from collapse.

When the 5th Marines re-embarked to join the 1st Marine Division for the assault landing at Inchon on 15 September, Obregon again took part. On 26 September, during the battle to recapture the South Korean capital, his heroic actions were recognized by a posthumous award of the Medal of Honor. The official citation reads, in part:

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving with Company G, Third Battalion, Fifth Marines, First Marine Division (Reinforced), in action against enemy aggressor forces at Seoul, Korea, on 26 September 1950. While serving as an ammunition carrier of a machine-gun squad in a Marine rifle company which was temporarily pinned down by hostile fire, Private First Class Obregon observed a fellow Marine fall wounded in the line of fire. Armed only with a pistol, he unhesitatingly dashed from his covered position to the side of the casualty. Firing his pistol with one hand as he ran, he grasped his comrade by the arm with his other hand and, despite the great peril to himself, dragged him to the side of the road.

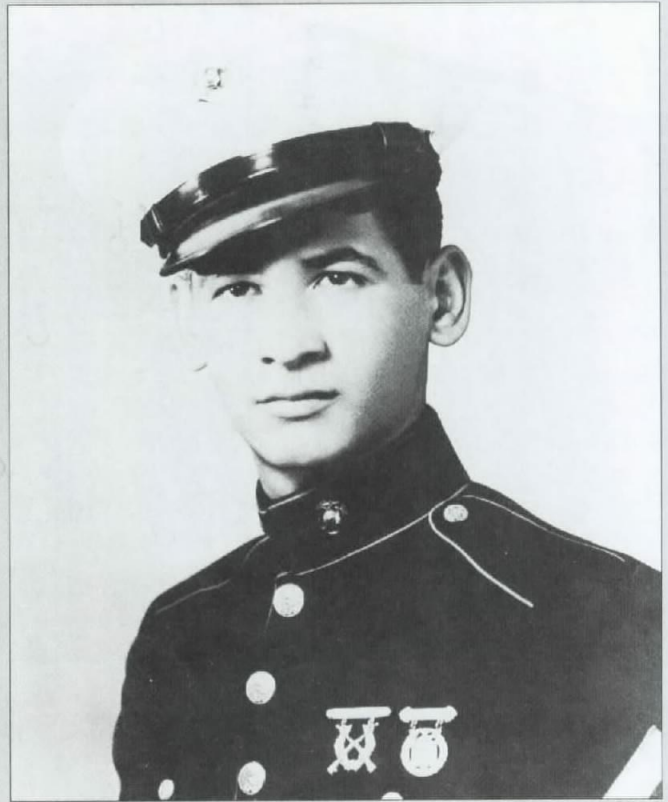
Still under enemy fire, he was bandaging the man's wounds when hostile troops of approximately platoon strength began advancing toward his position. Quickly seizing the wounded Marine's carbine, he placed his own body as a shield in front of him and lay there firing accurately and effectively into the hostile group until he himself was fatally wounded

But Hill 296 and Colonel Wol's hard-core survivors were not through with the 5th Marines. Company I's stouthearted advance encountered fierce opposition from the start. At one point McMullen led his troops into a maze of trenches manned by 200 North Koreans and forced them out by the sheer velocity of the assault—only to lose the position to a vicious counterattack. The two forces struggled across this

contested ground the balance of the afternoon. At day's end the Marines held the field but were too depleted to exploit their advantage. Captain McMullen fell wounded and was evacuated. He had qualified for his seventh Purple Heart in two wars. Two Marines in Company G, 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, fighting in somewhat lower ground adjacent to Company I's battlefield, each received their fifth wound since

the regiment's arrival in Pusan 53 days earlier.

Elsewhere during Company G's day-long fight, Corporal Bert Johnson, a machine-gunner, and Private First Class Eugene A. Obregon, his ammunition humper, tried to set up their weapon in an advanced position. The North Koreans charged, wounding Johnson with submachine gun fire. Obregon emptied his pistol at the shadows closing in, then dragged



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A43987-B

by enemy machine-gun-fire. Private First Class Obregon enabled his fellow Marines to rescue the wounded man and aided essentially in repelling the attack.

The fellow Marine, whose life Obregon had saved, was Private First Class Bert M. Johnson. He recovered from his wounds and was returned to active duty. Obregon's sacrifice was memorialized when a building at Camp Pendleton, a ship, and a high school in the Los Angeles area were named after him.

—Captain John C. Chapin, USMCR (Ret)



Photo by David Douglas Duncan

*Frightened civilians scurry to shelter while three Marine Corps Pershing tanks duel with North Korean antitank guns at a barricaded intersection along Ma Po Boulevard.*

Johnson to a defilade position to dress his wounds. When the enemy swarmed too close, Obregon picked up a carbine and emptied the clip, always shielding Johnson with his body. There were too many of them, and in the end the North Koreans shot him to pieces. But Obregon had delayed their attack long enough for other Marines to hustle down the slope and rescue Johnson. Private First Class Obregon's family would receive his posthumous Medal of Honor.

The two rifle companies had fought their damndest, but the 5th Marines still could not fight their way clear of the highlands. Stymied, Lieutenant Colonel Raymond Murray marshaled his forces for the final breakthrough on the morrow.

Nor was Murray in a position to maximize his supporting arms, as he had been able to do in the earlier assault on Smith's Ridge. He noted with some envy the volume of heavy-caliber indirect fire and the frequent Corsair missions being

delivered in support of Puller's advance to his right front. "Chesty used a lot of artillery," Murray said later. "And you could almost see a boundary line between the two of [us], the smoke coming up from his sector and very little smoke coming up from mine." Lieutenant Colonel Jon Hoffman, author of Puller's definitive biography, noted the irony that Puller had been criticized six years earlier at Peleliu for abjuring supporting arms while his infantry elements shattered themselves in direct assaults against Bloody Nose Ridge. By comparison, Colonel Harold D. "Bucky" Harris, commander of the 5th Marines at Peleliu, had received praise for his policy of being "lavish with ordnance and stingy with the lives of my men." Now, in the streets of Seoul, it was Puller's turn to be "lavish with ordnance."

Another bitter lesson learned by the 1st Marine Division at Peleliu was how to protect its tanks from suicide sapper attacks. The "Old Breed" was the only division in the subsequent battle of Okinawa not

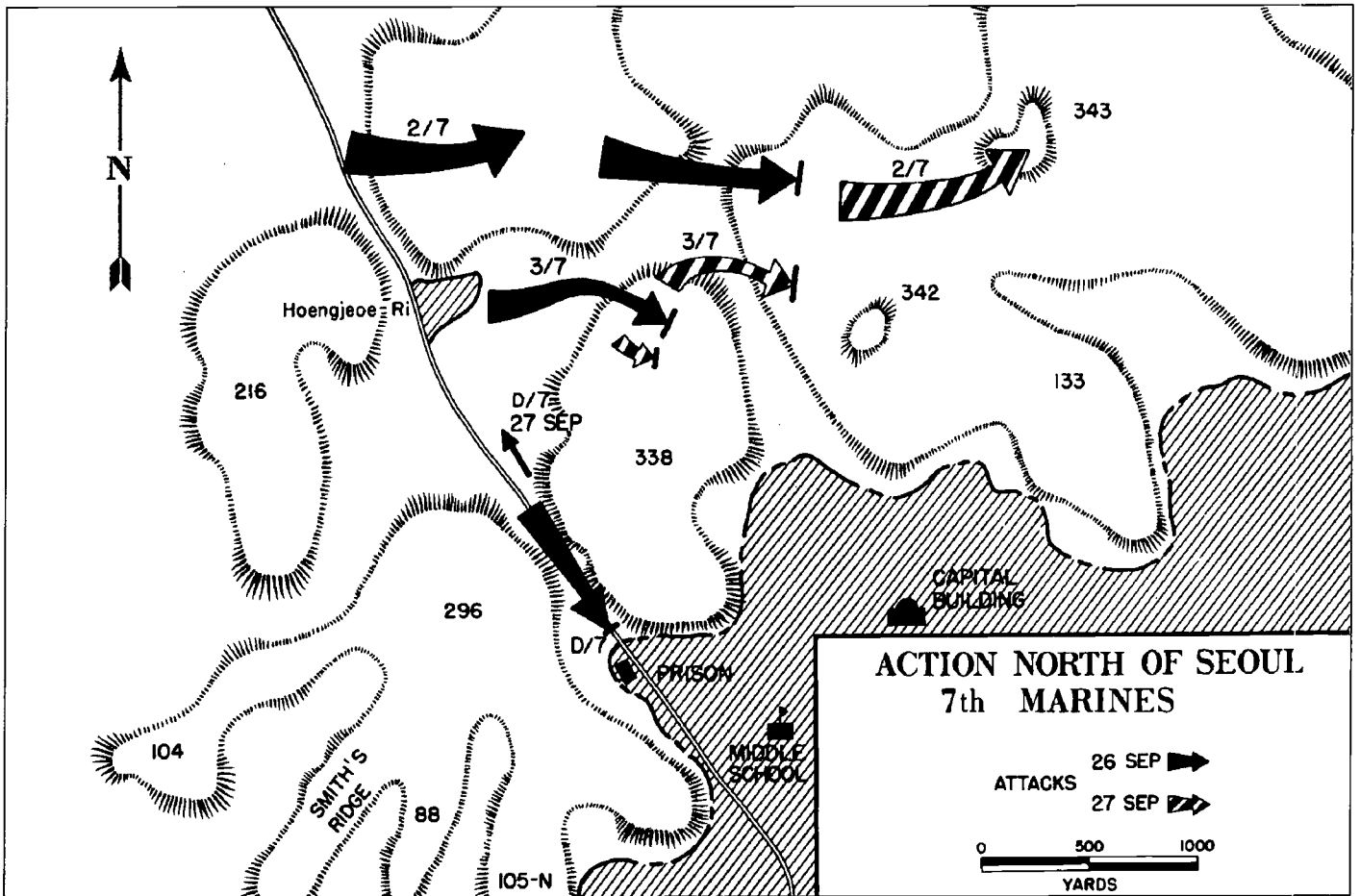
to lose a tank to Japanese sappers. In downtown Seoul on 26 September, however, this distinctive streak ended. A nimble-footed North Korean darted out from the rubble, caught 2d Battalion, 1st Marines' riflemen by surprise, and flung a satchel charge atop a passing flame tank, then vanished in the blast and smoke. The crew escaped unscathed, but the tank was destroyed. Angered and embarrassed by this bad luck, 2d Battalion's NCOs forcibly reminded their men to watch the adjacent alleys and rubble piles, not the tanks. This paid off. The NKPA launched a dozen more sapper attacks against Marine tanks operating in the center of the boulevard; Lieutenant Colonel Sutter's troops cut each one of them down.

There was no real "school solution" that applied to the kaleidoscopic action taking place on the streets of Seoul on the 26th of September. Captain Norman R. Stanford, commanding Company E, 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, had as much tactical experience as anyone on the scene, having served as a company commander in the 1st Marines throughout Peleliu and Okinawa. Sutter ordered Stanford to follow Company F up the boulevard in trace, then take the right fork while Company F took the left at a designated intersection ahead. Sutter's closing guidance was succinct: "Move out fast and keep going." But Company F encountered a particularly nasty barricade just past the intersection and could not advance up the left fork.

Captain Stanford went forward to assess the delay. From 200 yards away the NKPA barricade looked unassailable:

I took one look at the AT [antitank] muzzle blasts kicking aside the pall of smoke over the roadblock, and I





glanced at the thin flicker of automatic fire running across the barricade like a single line of flame and dived off the sidewalk into an alley.

Stanford's radio failed at this critical juncture. He had the option of bypassing Company F and the barricade and carrying out his assigned mission along the right fork, notwithstanding his naked left flank, or bowling straight ahead through Company F, smashing the barricade, and attacking with Company E up the left fork. He had the firepower—four tanks, an engineer platoon, rocket squads, and a 75mm recoilless rifle section attached. "I knew that we could go through anything for 250 yards," he said, risking the second option. He hurled his forces forward, towards the barricade. "We had it hot and heavy

among the burning buildings and the crumbled sandbags of the barricade, and then they broke and ran . . . and we butchered them among the Russian AT [antitank] guns and the Japanese Nambu machine guns." Company E lost two officers and 18 men in their headlong assault. Captain Stanford was one of the wounded.

Sutter's battalion, like Taplett's along the ridge just to the west, had fought their best, but "the fleeing enemy" had limited his advance to 1,200 yards. Seoul would not fall this day.

Further to the northwest, and now not very far away, the 7th Marines veered towards the capital in keeping with O. P. Smith's orders to pinch out the 5th Marines. Company D, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, led the advance along the Kaesong Highway as it threaded through

two towering hills, the now-infamous Hill 296 on the right and Hill 338 on the left. First Lieutenant William F. Goggin, the machine gun officer, led the advance party.

Compared to all the grief being experienced by the other two regiments on the 26th, the 7th Marines enjoyed what at first appeared to be a cakewalk. Thousands of grateful civilians thronged the right-of-ways and hillsides, cheering the approaching Marines. It was an uncommon experience for Marines of any war to date, a welcome grace note to serve as a partial offset for the horrors to come. The North Koreans, of course, took prompt advantage of this opportunity.

The dense crowds prevented Company D from maintaining its own outriding flank protection along the ridges on both sides of the road and caused the van to

overshoot the intended linkup point with the 5th Marines. The company unwittingly entered the city and the final defenses of one of the sacrificial battalions left behind by the departed *25th NKPA Brigade*.

Sudden machine gun fire from the front felled First Lieutenant William F. Goggin, halted the column, and created panic among the well wishers. Then other machine guns opened up at close range along the high ground on both sides. Another enemy force scrambled downhill to establish a blocking position in the rear. Company D was abruptly encircled and cut off.

Captain Richard R. Breen,

though wounded early in the fighting, maintained his presence of mind. He still commanded a large, fresh, well-armed company. Once the civilians vanished and his Marines went to ground in good firing positions, he figured his men could hold their own, despite the danger. When Colonel Litzenberg called to see what kind of help he needed, Breen answered calmly, "We're okay, Colonel."

Had Company D's entrapment occurred two days earlier the ensuing darkness might have proven catastrophic, but by now the NKPA forces lacked the punch to finish the job. Additionally, Captain Breen received some spectacular help. Two U.S. Air Force C-47s

dropped ammunition, rations, and medicine to the surrounded Marines just before dusk (one plane, badly shot up by North Korean antiaircraft gunners, had to crash-land at Kimpo). During the night Lieutenant (junior grade) Edward Burns, USN, the regimental surgeon, led a high-balling convoy of jeep ambulances through the enemy perimeter to retrieve 40 of Company D's most seriously wounded men.

Lieutenant Colonel Parry's 3d Battalion, 11th Marines, still in direct support of the 7th Marines, was the first artillery unit to cross the Han. At that point the infantry regiment extended from the north bank of the Haengju ferry crossing

*By the third full day of the battle for Seoul, the city lay in ruins. Shell holes buckled the streets, rubble lay strewn everywhere, and a thousand fires blazed furiously. Exhausted Marines regroup for the final barricade assault.*

Photo by Frank Noel, Associated Press



to the edge of Seoul, “a sector of 18 miles,” said Parry, which required him to deploy “three batteries on three separate azimuths.” Company D’s encirclement on the edge of Seoul on the 26th caused a predicament. The company had crossed into the 5th Marines zone, and “it was several hours before we were able to obtain clearance to shoot.” But Parry’s gunners made up for the delays with pinpoint defensive fires around the Company D perimeter throughout the night. “We were credited by the company commander with saving their bacon,” Parry said. The anticipated NKPA night attack did not materialize.

By now all of Colonel Homer L. Litzenberg’s 7th Marines had received their separate baptisms of fire. One member of Company B, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, recalled his own first combat encounter:

The company was above

*Marines of Company G, 5th Marines, jubilantly yank down the Communist flag at Government House and run up the American and United Nations flags.*

Seoul when we ran into a fire-fight. We were moving at night. [There were] green tracers coming in, red tracers going out. It was confusing . . . I was scared [and] pretty much hugged the ground. I didn’t even know how to dig a fox-hole, but the Gunnery Sergeant told me how: “Make it like a grave.”

The 26th of September, though devoid of major tactical gains in the fight for Seoul, ended with a significant operational breakthrough. At Suwon, 27 miles south of Seoul, three U.S. Army tanks of the 7th Cavalry raced into the perimeter of the 7th Division shortly before midnight. The Eighth Army had fought its way clear of the Pusan Perimeter, and its leading elements had linked up with X Corps.

For the 1st Marine Division, the climax of the Inchon-Seoul cam-

paign came on 27 September, and most of O. P. Smith’s disheveled troops seemed to sense the opportunity as soon as the new day dawned. Sunrise brought a special relief to Company D, 7th Marines, after its all-night vigil in the steep pass at the city limits. Litzenberg’s relief column of tanks, infantry, and engineers fought their way into the position against negligible opposition. Captain Breen received his second wound during the extraction of his company, but the volume of enemy fire had diminished sharply from the previous day. While no one enjoyed being cut off, surrounded, and pinned down for 18 hours, Company D had acquitted itself well and learned lessons that would prove valuable in the hill fights ahead.

On this day, the 5th Marines finally fought their way clear of Hill 296 and into the city streets. By 0930, Taplett’s 3d Battalion had linked up with Sutter’s 2d Battalion, 1st Marines. Taplett wheeled northeast, grimly aiming for the huge red banners still flying over Government House and Chang Dok Palace.

As the lead battalions of both regiments lengthened their strides, a sense of friendly rivalry spurred them into a race to raise the national colors over key landmarks. The 1st Marines fought their way into several embassies, led by Company E, pausing to raise the flag over first the French, then the Soviet (with great irony), and finally the United States residences. Growled one gunnery sergeant: “It looks like the 4th of July around here.”

Lieutenant Colonel Taplett’s 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, had a brief but fierce fight on its final approach to the palace. Die-hard North Koreans, bolstered by a pair of self-propelled guns, fought to

Photo courtesy of *Leatherneck Magazine*



## Private First Class Stanley R. Christianson

Private First Class Christianson was born in January 1925 in Mindore, Wisconsin. After he enlisted in the Marine Corps in October 1942, he served with the 2d Division in three World War II campaigns. For his services, he was awarded a Letter of Commendation. Following duty during the occupation of Japan, he had a variety of assignments, including drill instructor at Parris Island.

When the Korean War broke out, he was a member of Company E, 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, and took part in the Inchon assault. For his actions at Inchon, he received a Bronze Star Medal. During the subsequent battle for Seoul, he gave his life on 29 September, at the age of 25, on Hill 132. Private First Class Christianson's citation for the Medal of Honor awarded him reads, in part:

Manning one of the several listening posts covering approaches to the platoon area when the enemy commenced the attack, Private First Class Christianson quickly sent another Marine to alert the rest of the platoon. Without orders, he remained in his position and, with full knowledge that he would have slight chance of escape, fired relentlessly at oncoming hostile troops attacking furiously with rifles, automatic weapons and incendiary grenades. Accounting for seven enemy dead in the immediate vicinity before his position was overrun and he himself fatally struck down, Private First Class Christianson was responsible for allowing the rest of the platoon time to man positions, build up a stronger defense on that flank and repel the attack



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A-43986

with 41 of the enemy destroyed, and many more wounded and three taken prisoner.

After the war, his sacrifice was recognized by the dedication of a statue in his honor at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. —Captain John C. Chapin, USMCR (Ret)

the end. Taplett's tank-infantry teams carried the day. Colonel Robert D. Heintz preserved the dramatic climax: "Moving at the high port up Kwangwhamun Boulevard, Company G, 5th Marines burst into the Court of the Lions at Government House, ripped down the red flag, and Gunnery Sergeant Harold Beaver ran up those same colors his forebears had hoisted 103 years earlier atop the Palace of the Montezumas." Two Korean Marines raised their national colors at the National Palace.

The fight for Seoul continued, especially along the towering

ridgelines to the north, but by dusk in the city the NKPA had ceased to offer organized resistance. Twelve days after the surprise landing at Inchon (and two days after General Almond's victory communique), X Corps had seized sole possession of the capital city of the Republic of South Korea.

The 7th Marines continued to advance through the high ground north of the city, cutting the highway from Seoul to Uijongbu on the 28th. In this fighting Lieutenant Colonel Thornton M. Hinkle, commanding 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, was wounded and evacuated. Major Webb D. Sawyer took com-

mand. Meanwhile, the 31st Infantry and 17th ROK Infantry attacked to the east, successfully sealing off the last NKPA escape routes. There were still small bands of North Korean troops loose within the city—two of these struck the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, in predawn counterattacks as late as the 29th. The first occurred at 0445, when an observation post on Hill 132 was infiltrated by an estimated 70 to 100 North Korean troops. A second attack hit the left flank of the battalion a short time later. Both attacks were repulsed with a loss of 28 Marines wounded and four

killed, among them Private First Class Stanley R. Christianson, who subsequently received the Medal of Honor for his actions. Despite these counterattacks, the war was moving north, well above Seoul. Indeed, South Korean troops were about to cross the 38th Parallel.

On 29 September, General MacArthur and South Korean President Syngman Rhee and their wives returned to Seoul for a triumphant ceremony, accompanied by a large official retinue. The concentration of so many VIPs within the smoldering city so soon after the heavy fighting made General O. P. Smith nervous. Isolated NKPA anti-aircraft gunners still exacted a price against allied planes flying over the city's northern suburbs, especially the slow flying observation aircraft of VMO-6, which lost a single-engine OY and an HO3S-1 helicopter on the day of the ceremony. Smith positioned Lieutenant Colonel Taplett's 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, on the hill overlooking the palace and Lieutenant Colonel Ridge's 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, along the route to be taken by the dignitaries—out of sight, but loaded for bear.

Despite the cost of more than 700 Marine casualties in seizing most of Seoul during the climactic three days of 25-28 September, only a handful of Marines attended the commemorative ceremony. Generals Smith and Craig, Colonel Puller, and Lieutenant Colonel Murray were there (Puller barely so; when a Military Police officer barred his jeep from the sedan entrance he ordered Sergeant Jones to drive over the officious major), but Colonels Litzenberg and Brower were still fighting the war north of the city and the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing senior officers were gainfully employed elsewhere. In retrospect it is unfortu-



Photo by Frank Noel, Associated Press

*South Korean civilians curiously observe one of their exhausted Marine liberators.*

nate that more of those who had battled so hard for the victory—Marines, Navy corpsmen, soldiers, ROK troops, men of all ranks and specialties, grunts and aviators alike—could not have shared this special occasion. For a moment on the afternoon of the 27th, Seoul had seemed their dearly-won city. Two days later they were being told to remain out of sight of the official celebrants.

MacArthur conducted the special ceremony at high noon in the National Palace, ignoring the tinkle of broken glass that fell from the ceiling dome windows with every concussive rumble of distant artillery. "Mr. President," he intoned in his marvelous baritone voice, "By the grace of a merciful Providence our forces fighting under the standard of that greatest hope and inspiration of mankind, the United Nations, have liberated this ancient capital city of Korea . . . I am happy to restore to you, Mr. President, the seat of your govern-

ment that from it you may better fulfill your constitutional responsibilities." With tears running down his cheeks, MacArthur led the dignitaries in the Lord's Prayer. President Rhee was nearly overcome with emotion. To MacArthur he said: "We love you as the savior of our race."

The ceremony at the national capital represented Douglas MacArthur at his legendary finest. In the best of all worlds the Korean War would have ended on this felicitous note. In reality, however, the blazing speed with which MacArthur had reversed the seeming disaster in South Korea contained the seeds of a greater disaster to come in the north. The United States and the United Nations, flush with September's great victories, were fatally modifying their war aims to include the complete subjugation of North Korea and the forcible reunification of the entire peninsula. Already there were plans afoot to

deploy the Marines north of the 38th Parallel. General Almond took O. P. Smith aside as they were leaving the ceremony and issued a warning order. The 1st Marine Division would soon be making another "end-run" amphibious landing on the northeast coast.

Other threats materialized. On the day following the Seoul ceremony, Chinese Premier Chou En-Lai warned the world that his nation "will not supinely tolerate" the invasion of North Korea. Few

people in the West took him seriously.

In the meantime, Almond ordered Smith to seize and defend a series of blocking positions north of Seoul. The 5th Marines attacked northwest. The 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, executed an aggressive reconnaissance in force as far as the town of Suyuhyon against what the division special action report described as "moderate enemy resistance."

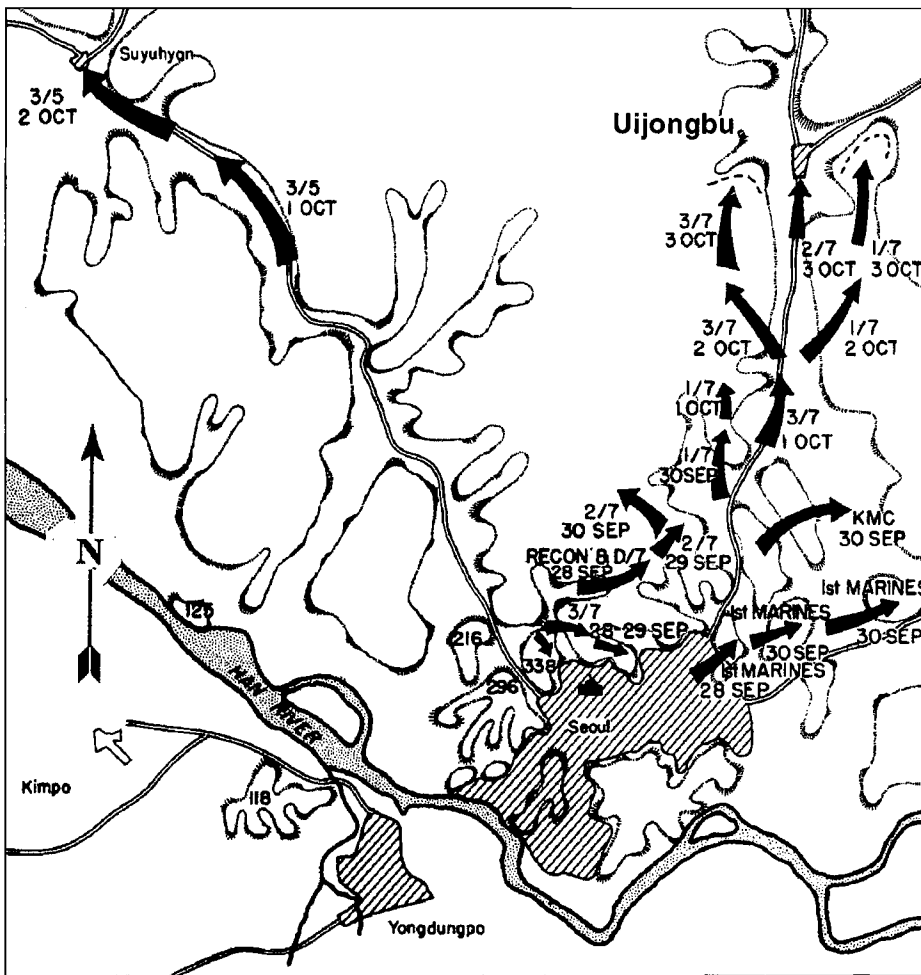
The 7th Marines drew the short-

est straw, the division objective of Uijongbu, a vital road junction in the mountains 16 miles due north of Seoul. Here the highway and railroad tracks veer northeast towards the port of Wonsan and beyond, an important escape route for NKPA forces fleeing the "hammer and anvil" of the now converging Eighth Army with X Corps.

Smith reinforced the 7th Marines by attaching Major Parry's 3d Battalion, 11th Marines (reinforced with a battery of 155mm howitzers from 4th Battalion, 11th Marines), plus one company each of Pershing tanks, combat engineers, and Korean Marines, and an Army anti-aircraft battery. This constituted a sizable force, virtually a small brigade, but Colonel Litzenberg would need every man in his three-and-a-half day battle for the road junction. Intelligence reports available to Litzenberg indicated he would be opposed by an amalgamation of NKPA units, including the remnants of the *Seoul City Regiment*; the *2d Regiment*, *17th Rifle Division*, withdrawn from the Pusan Perimeter after the Inchon landing; and the fresh *75th Independent Regiment*, which reached Uijongbu from Hamhung the day before the 7th Marines attacked.

Principal air support for Litzenberg's advance would come from the Corsair pilots of Lieutenant Colonel Frank J. Cole's VMF-312, the Checkerboard squadron, newly arrived at Kimpo from Itami, Japan. Cole had commanded the same squadron as a major at the end of World War II and had trained his new aviators exceptionally well.

On 1 October, Colonel Litzenberg led his well-armed force northward. Advance aerial and map reconnaissance led him to conclude that the NKPA would most likely make a stand at



**PURSUIT OF THE NKPA  
&  
CAPTURE OF UIJONGBU  
28 SEP -- 3 OCT 1950**





Photo by Frank Noel, Associated Press

*A Marine mortar section moves north of Seoul past a grateful band of South Koreans.*

Nuwon-ni where the highway passed through a narrow defile—a veritable “Apache Pass.” Litzenberg planned for Lieutenant Colonel Raymond G. Davis’ 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, to execute a tactical feint along the high ground on both sides, while Major Maurice E. Roach’s tank-heavy 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, barreled straight through the pass during the distraction. The plan ran awry when Roach encountered a thick minefield in the pass. Litzenberg shifted both battalions to the high ground, and the Checkerboards of VMF-312 appeared at dawn on the 2d with a vengeance, bombing, strafing, and dropping napalm canisters. Davis and Roach scratched

forward slowly along both ridges; the engineers labored in the minefields. But the North Koreans contested every yard, shooting down three Corsairs, disrupting the engineers, and limiting the Marines to less than a quarter-mile gain that day. During this fighting, Second Lieutenant Joseph R. Owen, the mortar officer in Company B, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, learned bitter lessons in tactical communications. “The North Koreans,” he said, “used whistles and bugles for battlefield command, more effective by far than our walkie-talkies.” In addition, Lieutenant Lloyd J. Englehardt of VMO-6 flew his glassy-nosed HO3S-1 helicopter through heavy fire to rescue

downed Checkerboard pilot Captain Wilbur D. Wilcox near the village of Chun-chon.

On 3 October, the regiment unveiled a good-luck piece, General Clifton B. Cates, Commandant of the Marine Corps, nicknamed “Lucky” Cates for his survival amid the First World War’s bloodiest battlefields. Cates had flown to Korea to observe his Marines in action. Litzenberg’s force put on a stellar show. The engineers having at considerable cost cleared the minefield in the defile, Major Webb D. Sawyer’s 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, pounded straight up the middle. Soon they began overrunning enemy field pieces and had the enemy on the

run. The NKPA had staked everything on holding the pass at Nuwon-ni and had little left to defend Uijongbu. Litzenberg unleashed all his forces. Sawyer's men stormed through the ruined town by late afternoon, the major pausing to telephone Litzenberg—widely known by his nickname “Litz the Blitz”—saying, “This is the Mayor of Blitz!”

The Uijongbu drive cost the 7th Marines 13 killed and 111 wounded, but the combat experience was worth the price to the newly formed regiment. Observed Lieutenant Joseph Owen: “For Baker-One-Seven it was combat training under fire; in those five

days we became a good Marine rifle company.”

The battle for the Nuwon-ni Pass marked the end of significant fighting in the Inchon-Seoul campaign. Almost immediately the 1st Marine Division turned over its assigned sector to the 1st Cavalry Division of the Eighth Army and began returning by regiments to the vicinity of Inchon for re-embarkation.

The leading elements of the division and other X Corps components assembled at a United Nations cemetery near Inchon on 6 October to honor their dead. Division Chaplain Robert M. Schwyhart led the spiritual salute.

*From left, BGen Edward A. Craig; the Commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen Clifton B. Cates; and MajGen Oliver P. Smith, inspect the North Korean flag that recently was hauled down by Marines at Government House in Seoul.*

*Photo courtesy of Leatherneck Magazine*



Major General Oliver P. Smith laid a wreath on the grave of Corporal Richard C. Matheny, a stalwart squadleader of the 5th Marines who before his death qualified in swift succession for the Bronze Star, Silver Star, and Navy Cross.

The combined Inchon-Seoul campaign cost the 1st Marine Division 2,450 casualties, according to the official history (415 killed or died of wounds; 2,029 wounded in action; 6 missing in action). North Korean gunners shot down 11 fighters of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing. For their part, the Marines destroyed or captured 47 Russian-built tanks and sufficient heavy mortars, field guns, antitank guns, machine guns, and rifles to equip a good-sized brigade. A preponderance of the 14,000 NKPA fatalities claimed by X Corps in the campaign resulted from the combined air-ground fire of the Marines.

Such statistics had more relevance in World War II than in the murky political and psychological nature of limited warfare in the Atomic Age. The Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union and their respective allies and surrogates was fully underway by 1950. In Seoul in September of that year, the United Nations for the first time restored the freedom of a democratic capital captured by Communist force of arms. The fact that all of X Corps' hard-fought gains would be swept away by the Chinese Communist counter-offensive three months later added to the bitter-sweet irony of this protracted war. In the final accounting, the 1953 ceasefire left Seoul firmly established as the capital of the Republic. Seoul's flourishing growth and development over the ensuing half century remain a tribute to the sacrifices of all those who fought and died to recapture



## 1st Marine Division Daily Casualties, Seoul Campaign

Date	Killed in Action	Died of Wounds	Missing in Action	Wounded in Action	Total Battle Casualties
20 Sep	24	1	3	119	147
21 Sep	30	3	0	198	231
22 Sep	27	3	0	135	165
23 Sep	19	7	0	117	143
24 Sep	68	4	0	217	289
25 Sep	33	4	1	238	276
26 Sep	29	7	0	167	203
27 Sep	33	3	0	153	189
28 Sep	8	4	0	31	43
29 Sep	19	1	0	49	69
30 Sep	11	2	0	48	61
1 Oct	2	1	0	16	19
2 Oct	15	1	0	81	97
3 Oct	2	1	0	35	38
4 Oct	0	0	0	3	3
5 Oct	1	1	0	3	5
Total	321	43	4	1,510	1,878

Appendix J. Montross & Canzana. *The Inchon-Seoul Operation*, 1955

and protect the ancient city.

### Operation Yo-Yo The Wonsan Landing

General MacArthur ordered General Almond to re-embark X Corps and execute a series of amphibious landings along the east coast of North Korea. The 1st Marine Division would board designated shipping at Inchon and land tactically at Wonsan, the main event. The 7th Division would proceed south to Pusan to board its ships for a subsequent landing north of Wonsan. The original D-Day for the Marines at Wonsan was 15 October. The actual landing date was not even close.

Operation Chromite was the codename for the Inchon landing. The troops would nickname the

Wonsan campaign "Operation Yo-Yo."

Inchon and Wonsan serve as book-end examples of amphibious warfare's risks and rewards. By all rights it should have been Inchon, with its legion of tactical and hydrographic dangers, that sputtered in execution. Wonsan, scheduled for attack by a larger and, by now, more experienced landing force against a sharply diminished enemy threat, should have been a snap. But in the irony of war, Inchon stands as a masterpiece, Wonsan as a laughingstock, as ill-conceived a landing as the United States ever conducted.

In late September 1950, there was nothing particularly wrong with the concept of a long-distance "Right Hook" amphibious landing from the Sea of Japan to seize

Wonsan and other smaller ports along the North Korean coast. Wonsan at the time represented a reasonable objective, and the 1st Marine Division had proven its amphibious prowess in the difficult landing at Inchon and was expected to be available for the new mission in early October.

Wonsan had the best natural harbor in the Korean peninsula. Located 80 miles north of the 38th Parallel, the port's bulwark-like Kalma Peninsula provided an enormous sheltered harbor, a seven-inch tidal range, weak currents, rare fog, and a moderate beach gradient—all incomparably more favorable than Inchon. Wonsan's near-shore topography also offered a decent lodgement area, suitable for a division beach-head, before the Taebaek

Mountains—eastern North Korea's long, towering spine—reared upwards from the coastal plain. The port's strategic appeal centered on the combination of its accessible harbor with a high-capacity airfield, petroleum refining facilities, and its location astride major railroads and high-

ways leading west to the North Korean capital of Pyongyang, north to Hungnam, and southwest to Seoul.

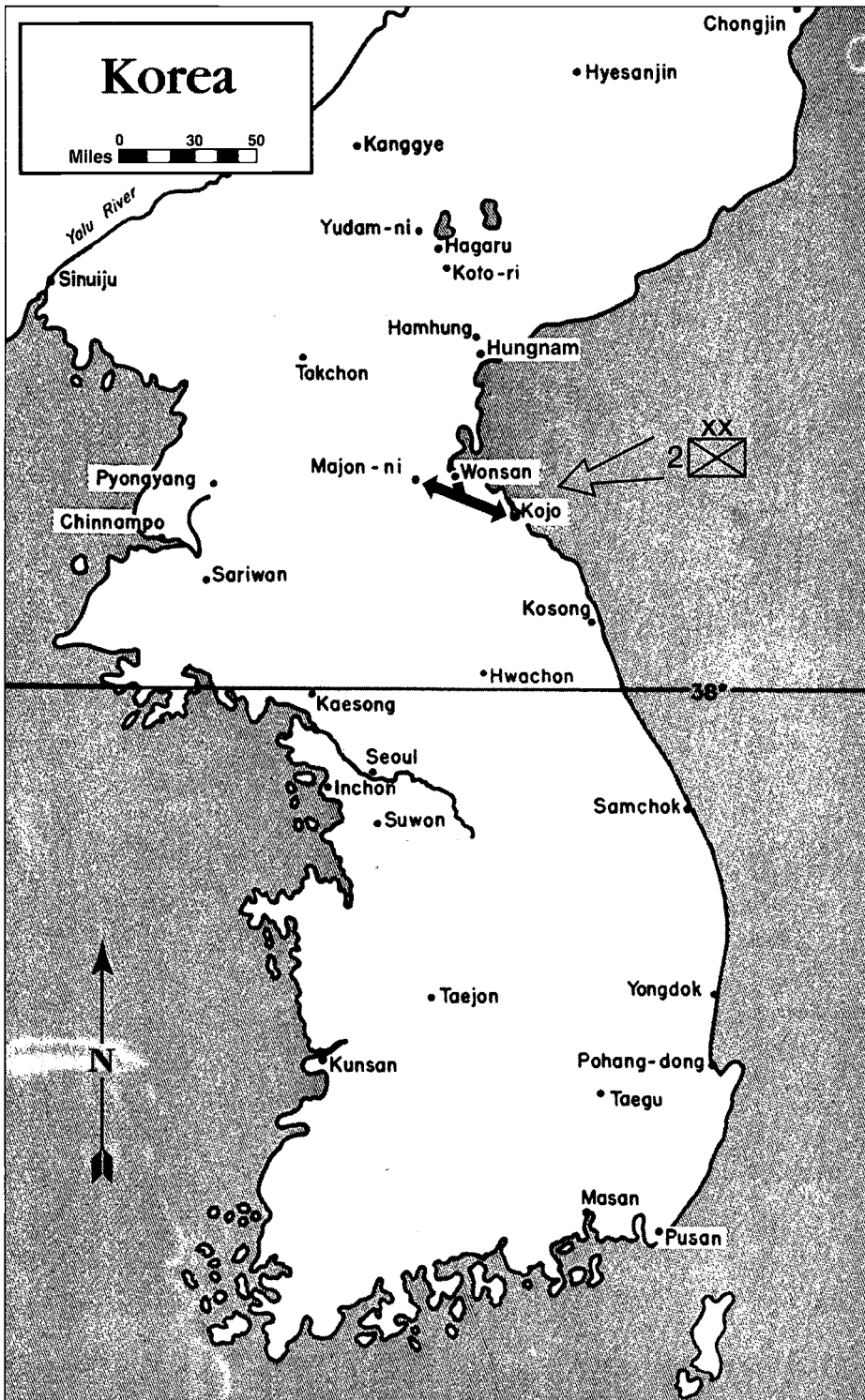
On 4 October, General Almond formally assigned the 1st Marine Division the mission of seizing and securing the X Corps base of operations at Wonsan, protecting the

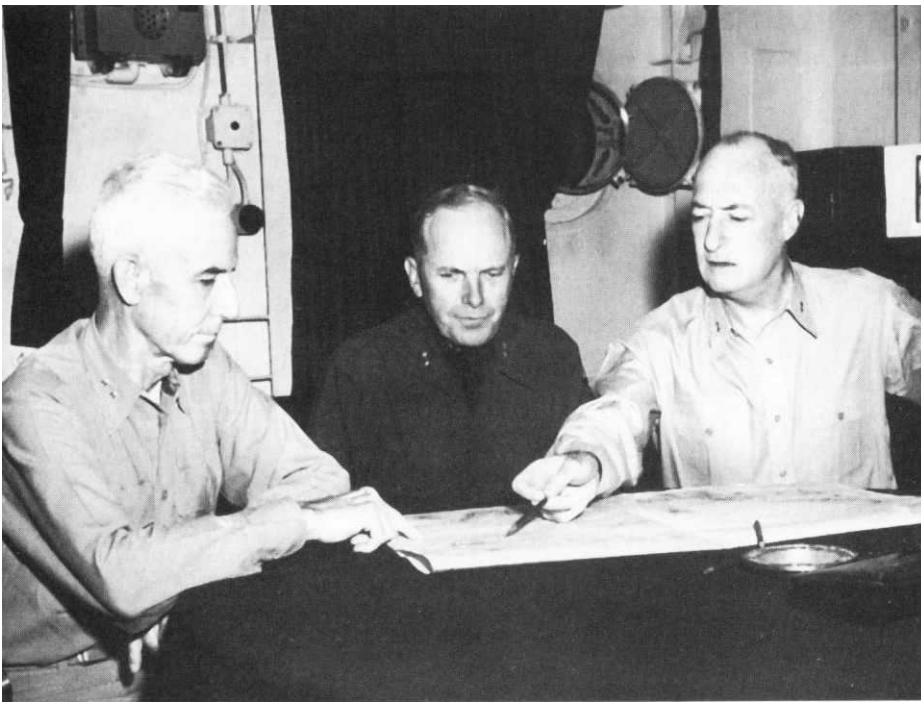
airfield, and continuing inland operations as assigned. Three unforeseen developments almost immediately knocked the Wonsan plans into a cocked hat: massive port congestion; a drastically accelerated invasion of North Korea; and the successful mining of their coastal ports by the North Koreans. As a consequence, MacArthur's celebrated "Right Hook" became suspended in mid-air, leaving the Marines (and all of X Corps) hanging in limbo—out of action—throughout a critical three-week period. The Wonsan landing, when it finally occurred, has been aptly described by military historians as "the most anticlimactic a landing as Marines have ever made."

The 1st Marine Division operations order directed a simultaneous landing of the 1st and 7th Marines abreast on the eastern shore of the Kalma Peninsula, each supported by an artillery battalion and a battalion of Korean Marines. Wonsan airfield lay directly inland, as close to the landing beaches as Kadena and Yontan had been to the Hagushi beaches at Okinawa.

On 7 October, the day following the cemetery ceremony in Inchon, Major General O. P. Smith reported as landing force commander for the Wonsan expedition to Rear Admiral James H. Doyle, USN, commanding the Attack Force, U.S. Seventh Fleet. The division began embarking at Inchon the next day. It would take a week.

Here MacArthur's plans began to unwind. No one, it seems, had foreseen the tremendous strain about to be placed on the only two medium-capacity ports available, Inchon and Pusan, during a time of conflicting requirements to offload the mammoth supplies needed for the Eighth Army's invasion of western North Korea while simultaneously backloading two large divi-





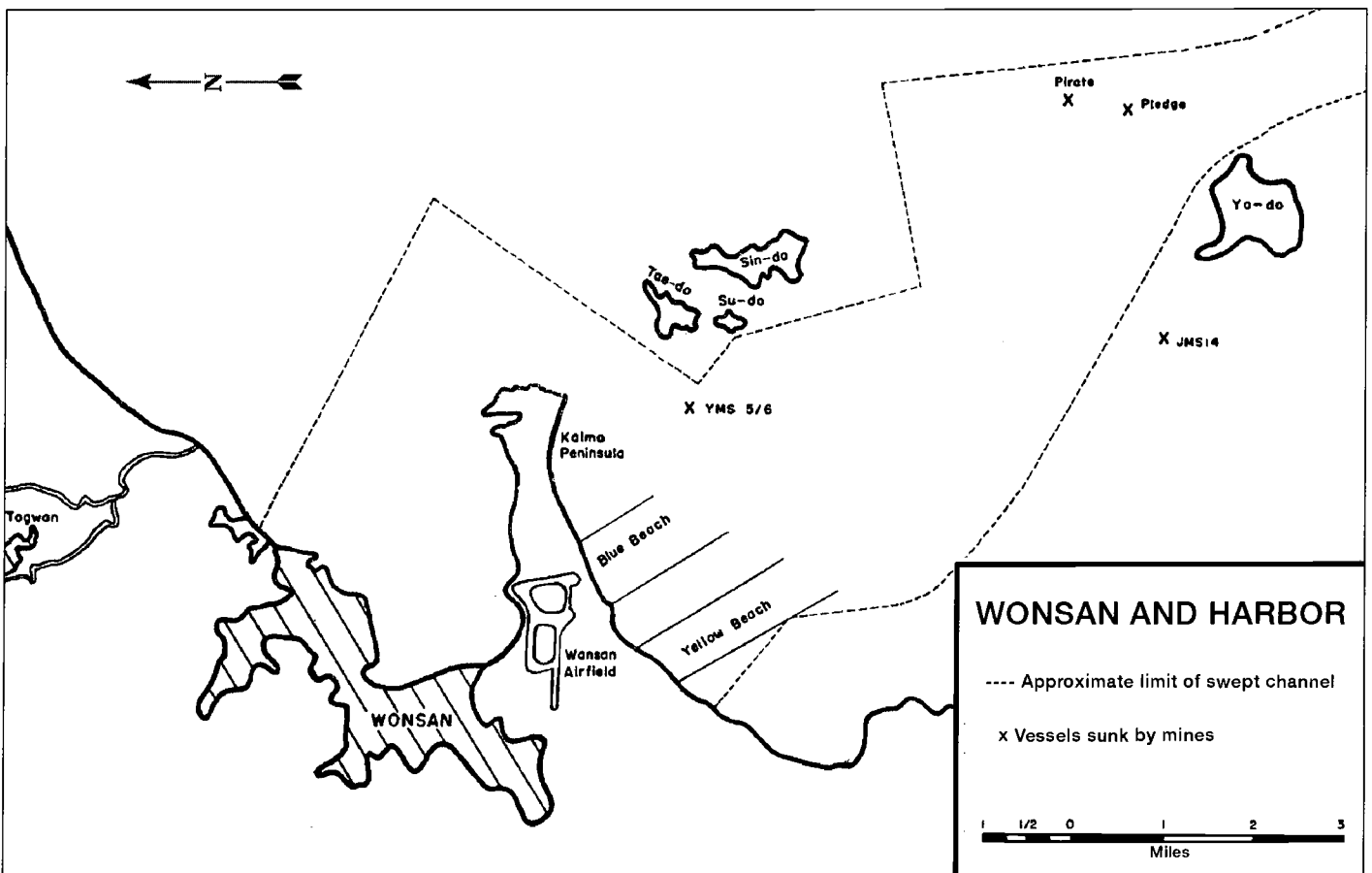
Gen Oliver P. Smith Collection, Marine Corps Research Center  
*From left, MajGen Oliver P. Smith, MajGen Edward M. Almond, and RAdm James H. Doyle discuss plans for the Wonsan landing on board the Mount McKinley.*

sions for the X Corps' "Right Hook." The piers, staging areas, and access roads in both ports

became impossibly congested. Chaos reigned.

Combat loading for an opposed

amphibious assault is an exact and time-consuming science. The 1st Marine Division, now fully fleshed out with the 7th Marines and other missing components, had 25,840 officers and men on the rolls for the Wonsan expedition, easily the largest division of any nation fighting in the Korean War. Admiral Doyle's Attack Force contained 66 amphibious ships plus six commercial cargo ships, but many of the vessels arrived late in the crowded port, few contained the preloaded 10-day levels of Class I, II, and IV supplies as promised, and the Attack Force still provided insufficient total lift capacity for all the division's rolling stock. The precise art of combat loading became the improvised "art of the possible," but each compromise cost time. As the division's special action report dryly noted, General Almond's prescribed D-day of 15 October "was moved progressively



back to a tentative date of 20 October.”

As junior officer in Company B, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, Second Lieutenant Joseph R. Owen assumed the demanding duties of company embarkation officer. “We were assigned an old LST that our Navy had used in World War II,” he said, “but which was now leased to Japan for use as a cargo ship.” The Japanese captain spoke no English but conveyed to Owen by angry gestures his displeasure at what seemed to him to be gross overloading of his ship’s safe lift capacity. When Owen’s runner charged the bolt on his carbine the skipper abruptly acquiesced. “There was a shortage of shipping,” Owen rationalized, “and, we were informed, we would be afloat for only a few days.”

Private First Class Morgan Brainard of Company A, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, boarded his assigned LST without bitching: “All we knew at that moment was that we were steaming south; that we were in dry clothes with a roof over our heads, and assured of two hot meals a day and the chance to take salt water showers . . . . Our slice of life seemed to be improving.”

Most of Admiral Doyle’s Wonsan Attack Force completed loading the 1st Marine Division and sortied from Inchon on 15 October, the original D-Day. By that time the other two factors that would render the planned assault meaningless had materialized. Five days earlier, Republic of Korea’s I Corps had seized Wonsan by overland advance from the south. On 13 October, Major General Field Harris, commander of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, flew into Wonsan airfield, followed the next day by the Checkerboards of Lieutenant Colonel Cole’s VMF-312 and other elements of Marine Aircraft Group 12.

In the meantime, Admiral Doyle’s advance force commander discovered that the North Koreans had sewn the approaches to Wonsan with more than 2,000 anti-ship mines, both contact and magnetic. The U.S. Navy had only 12 minesweepers available in the theater—as compared to the 100 employed in support of the Okinawa landing five years earlier—and even when reinforced by Korean and Japanese craft, the mission proved overwhelming. Two U.S. minesweepers hit mines and sank on 12 October. Heavy fire from North Korean coast defense guns hampered rescue operations. A Japanese sweeper sank on the 18th; the next day a huge mine practically vaporized a South Korean craft. Doyle’s experiments in dropping 1,000-pound bombs and anti-submarine depth charges to create enough overpressure to detonate nearby mines failed. Even the fact that a linear, tactical landing had been replaced by a simpler administrative offload from amphibian tractors and landing craft in column did not help expedite the problem. Rear Admiral Allan E. Smith, commanding Task Force 95, the advance force, voiced the frustration of all hands when he reported: “we have lost control of the seas to a nation without a navy, using pre-World War I weapons, laid by vessels that were utilized at the time of the birth of Christ.”

General Almond’s frustration knew no bounds. On 20 October, with the war fast shifting away from his active influence (the Eighth Army entered the North Korean capital Pyongyang the previous day), and with no end in sight to the tedious minesweeping, Almond departed the flagship by helicopter and established his command post ashore at Wonsan.

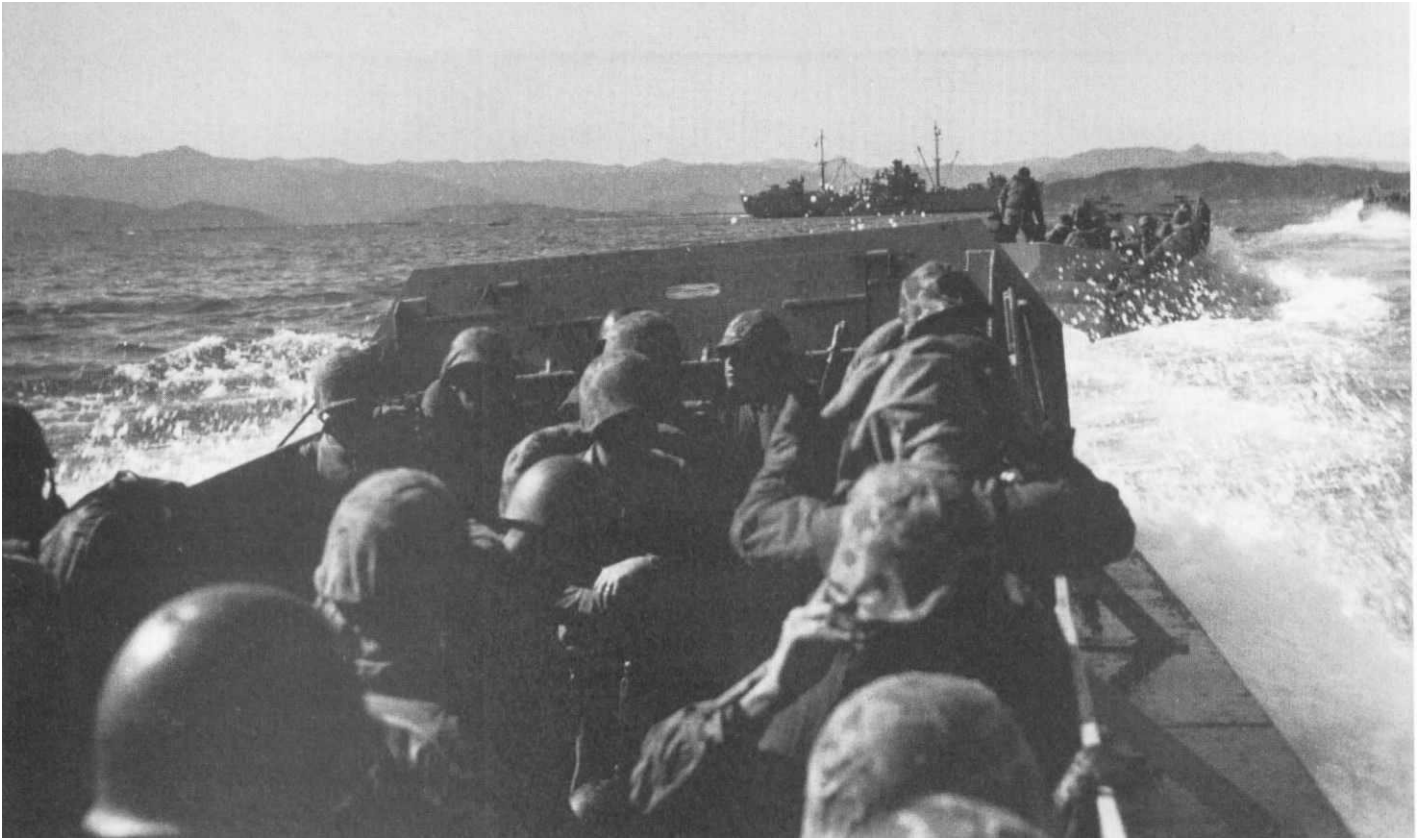
As for the embarked Marines,

rampant rumors swept the transports, especially beginning the afternoon of 19 October when the task force suddenly got underway, heading south. “War’s over!” exclaimed many a Marine, “We’re going back to Pusan and then heading home!” But the ships were only taking new precautions to protect themselves in hostile waters. For the next week—and a week is a very long time at sea on board transports as claustrophobically crowded as these—the ships reversed course every 12 hours, first heading south, then north, then starting over. Here emerged the sarcastic nickname “Operation Yo-Yo.” As voiced by Marine Corps historians Lynn Montross and Nicholas A. Canzona in 1957: “Never did time die a harder death, and never did the grumblers have so much to grouse about.”

The Japanese-crewed LST transporting Lieutenant Owen’s company soon ran low on provisions and fresh water. As Owen recalled: “a three-week ordeal of misery and sickness . . . . The stench below-decks made the air unbreathable.”

Before long sickness swept the embarked landing force. Long lines of Marines suffering from dysentery and gastroenteritis overwhelmed poorly-equipped sick bays. The “Binnacle List” on board the converted civilian transport *Marine Phoenix* ran to 750 Marines at the height of the epidemic. The attack transport *Bayfield* (APA 33) reported a confirmed case of smallpox. As a final insult to the division’s pride, a traveling USO show featuring Bob Hope and Marilyn Maxwell beat them to Wonsan, performing for an appreciative audience of Marine aviators and ROK soldiers while the fierce “spearhead” assault troops rocked in misery among the offshore swells.

At long last, on 26 October, the 1st Marine Division landed on the



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A4313

*Finally off the ships, the 1st Marine Division, which ended its interminable "Operation Yo-Yo" on 26 October, chugs*

*ashore by Navy LCVP towards Wonsan, North Korea.*

*In the anticlimactic landing of the 1st Marine Division at Wonsan, troops dismount from a column of LVT-3Cs and their escorting LVTA-5 armored amphibians along the*

*Wonsan airfield. A chill wind blows in from the looming Taebaek Mountains.*

Department of Defense Photo (USN) 421366





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A130364

*The 1st Marine Division suffered the ignominy of landing at Wonsan weeks after South Korean forces had seized the port and the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing had arrived. Here a col-*

*umn of soaked infantrymen straggles ashore among good-hearted catcalls by VMF-312, the "Checkerboard" squadron.*

Kalma Peninsula below Wonsan. "The day was bright and cold," recalled Private First Class Brainard of Company A, 1st Marines, "and the sea had a real chop to it as our [LVT] slid down the ramp and nosed forward into the water." The captain of Brainard's ship wished the departing Marines luck over the public address system, adding that MacArthur's headquarters had just announced that the troops should be "home by Christmas."

The airmen of the Checkerboard squadron hooted in derision as the infantry streamed ashore, puffing with exertion after three weeks of enforced inactivity. Lieutenant

Owen encountered more sarcastic insults from the ROK troops who had captured the town 16 days before: "They had learned the middle-finger salute, which they rendered to us with great enthusiasm."

Colonel Puller bristled at the ignominy of his regiment being categorized as rear echelon troops due to no fault of their own. Then Brigadier General Edward A. Craig met Puller on the beach with the welcome news that he had just been selected for promotion to brigadier general. Puller's trademark scowl vanished momentarily. Then he turned to the job at hand. His regiment was about to be dispersed over a huge area of enemy

territory, beginning with the deployment of Lieutenant Colonel Jack Hawkins' 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, on a special mission to relieve a ROK force guarding a supply depot at the coastal town of Kojo, 40 miles south.

Puller's dilemma reflected the drastic changes in United Nations' strategic objectives being formulated it seemed, day-by-day. The war in North Korea had evolved from the establishment of coastal operating bases and the methodical elimination of residual NKPA forces to a wide-open race to the Yalu River, the Chinese border. General O. P. Smith, accustomed to a relatively narrow zone of action

in the Inchon-Seoul campaign, suddenly found himself responsible for a zone measuring 300 miles long by 50 miles deep. With General Almond already calling for two infantry regiments to advance as far north as Hamhung, Smith knew Puller's 1st Marines would

be hard-pressed to cover an uncommonly large piece of real estate around the port of Wonsan. The Kojo assignment was but the first of several far-flung missions Puller would have to handle.

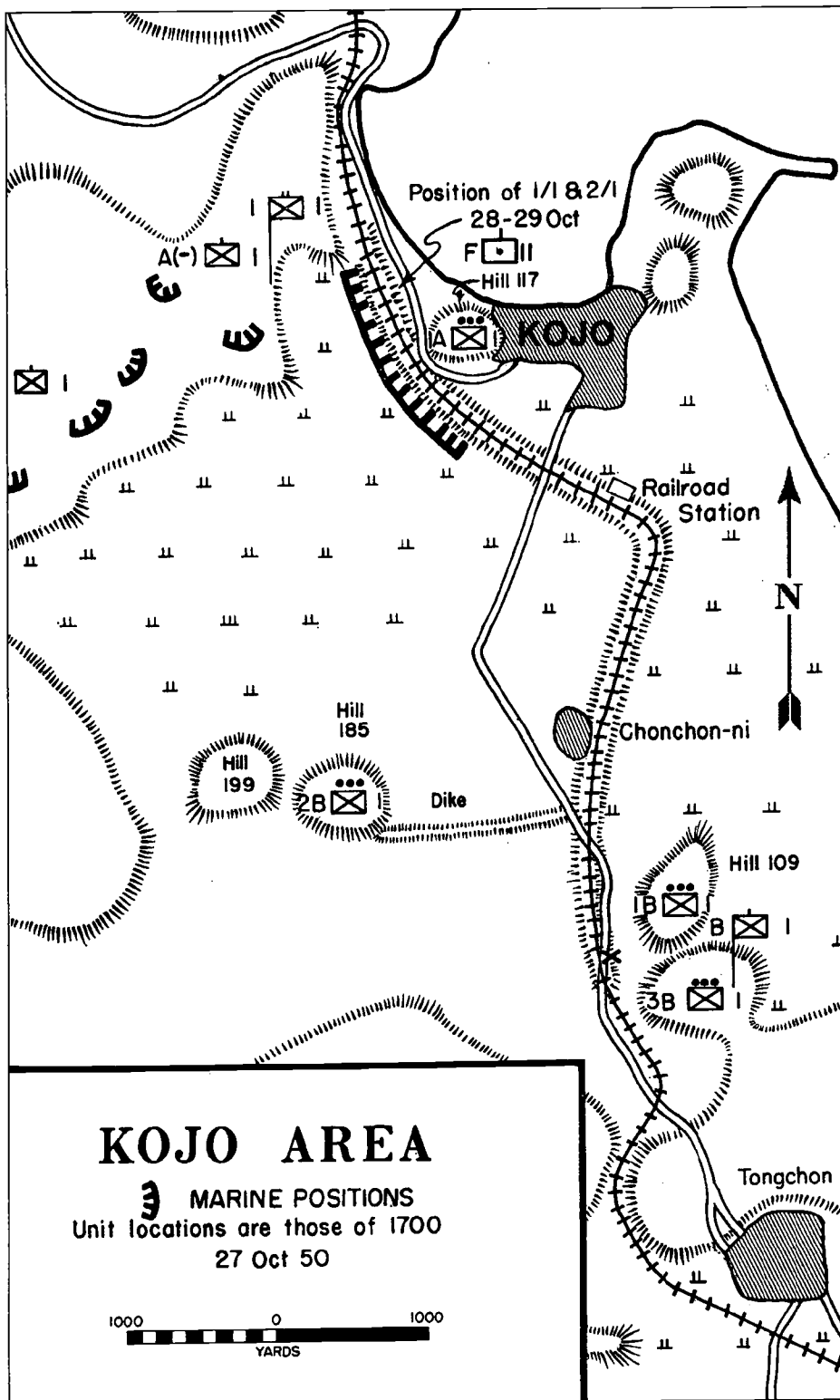
Half of Hawkins' battalion departed within hours after their

landing on the 26th. The troops were still shaking out their sea legs when they clambered into a long line of empty gondola cars of a coal train bound for Kojo. It was an uncomfortable and singularly dirty ride. Captain Barrow noted that the residual coal "left a mark on all of us." The train had to make two trips to deliver the entire battalion, and those units traveling by road, like the attached artillery battery, did not arrive until the second night.

The troops dismounted from the train at Kojo stiff and disoriented. The town itself proved picturesque, but the supply dump had been largely emptied by the departing ROK garrison, too many hills dominated the town, and there was a critical lack of intelligence about a North Korean "guerilla force" reportedly lurking in the area. "Quite candidly," admitted Barrow, "I never understood our mission."

The situation bothered Hawkins acutely. The late-afternoon approach of 3,000 refugees towards Kojo made him more uneasy. These Hawkins diverted into an assembly area outside the seaport, but their unimpeded approach reflected the vulnerability of his position. The largely depleted supply dump lay in low ground, difficult to defend. A well-defined avenue of approach into the seaport lay open from the south and southwest. "Therefore," Hawkins wrote shortly after the Kojo action, "I decided to place Company B in outpost positions to cover these approaches . . . . The remainder of the battalion would be deployed on the hill massif west of Kojo."

Accordingly, Captain Wesley C. Noren deployed Company B on outpost duty along three scattered hills two miles south of town. As night fell, Noren placed his men





Gen Oliver P. Smith Collection, Marine Corps Research Center

*Men of the 1st Marines sweep through the village of Kojo following the sudden, violent, and well-coordinated North Korean night attacks of 27 October on the 1st Battalion's positions.*

on 50 percent alert: each foxhole to contain one man awake, the other halfway zipped-up in his sleeping bag. The night was chilly; that morning the Marines had discovered the first ice of the season in the rice paddies. Their last fire-fight in burning Seoul a month ago had left them gasping in the heat. Now they began to shiver.

The security measures prescribed by Hawkins and Noren were normal under the assumed threat—light probing attacks by small bands of guerrillas. No one then knew that Noren's dispersed platoons had taken their night positions within direct observation of a significant organized force, the *10th Regiment, 5th NKPA Division*. Colonel Cho Il Kwon commanded

this regiment, one of the highly disciplined forces led by veterans of the fighting in China that had spearheaded the invasion of South Korea four months earlier. Cho and his men had successfully evaded the "hammer and anvil" trap set by the United Nations forces after Inchon and returned essentially intact across the border. The regiment had left its tanks and artillery along the Naktong River, but still possessed plenty of mortars and machine guns. With more than a thousand assault troops at hand, Cho had the numbers and leadership to overwhelm Noren's outposts and simultaneously attack the flank of Hawkins' main positions west of Kojo.

Rarely in their long history had

the 1st Marines been in such mortal danger. Cho's veterans moved out of their staging areas at nightfall and approached each outpost with disciplined stealth. These men were superb night-fighters. Some infiltrated undetected to within 10 feet of the nearest Marine foxholes. At precisely 2200, they attacked with sub-machine guns, grenades, and shrill screams.

Noren's rifle squads never had a chance. Seven Marines died in one platoon before they could even scramble out of their sleeping bags. Vicious hand-to-hand fighting swept the hilltops. Some units were cut off and scattered. Well-drilled junior non-commissioned officers grabbed disorganized indi-





Sketch by Sgt. Charles H. Waterhouse, USMC (left)

*A Navy corpsman drags a wounded Marine out of the line of fire. The artist added the Red Cross band on the corpsman's arm to provide color to the composition, admitting in his original caption that most corpsmen discarded the brassard as too tempting a target to enemy snipers.*

viduals and formed small counter-attacks. When the 1st Platoon, abruptly missing 30 men, had to abandon Hill 109 just north of Noren's command post, Sergeant Clayton Roberts singlehandedly covered their withdrawal with his light machine gun until the North Koreans slipped in close and killed him.

Captain Noren kept his head, swiftly calling in mortar fire and trying to make sense of the pandemonium. One thing was sure—this was no guerrilla band. Judged by their night-fighting skills alone, Noren knew he was under attack by one of the original *Inmin Gun* outfits, supposedly destroyed by the United Nations' breakout.

Captain Noren held the scattered pieces of his beleaguered company together until 2350, no small achievement in the confusion, then radioed Hawkins for permission to withdraw. Hawkins assented. The battalion comman-

der was much more in the dark than Noren, but he knew that Captain Robert P. Wray's Company C on the right rear flank had been hit hard by a violent surprise attack. Noren then executed a masterful point-by-point withdrawal under extreme enemy pressure. By 0200, he organized the surviving members of Baker Company into a 360-degree defensive circle along the railroad tracks about 2,500 yards below Kojo. At 0300, Noren established radio contact with the 4.2-inch mortar platoon whose steady fire then helped disrupt the NKPA forces converging on the small band.

Noren held his new position throughout the rest of the night. At the first grayness of dawn he began evacuating his wounded, dragging them north in ponchos through the thin ice and thick mud of the rice paddies. Suddenly a force of 200 of Colonel Cho's night fighters appeared out of the

gloom, heading south, like vampires trying to outrun the sun. There was just enough light for the entire battalion to enjoy a "Turkey Shoot," including the newly arrived Battery F, 2d Battalion, 11th Marines. Seventy-five of this group of North Koreans never made it back to their sanctuary. Perhaps twice again as many NKPA bodies lay within the original Marine positions.

Fragmented reports of a major attack against 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, at Kojo began to arrive at the division command post around 0700 the next morning. Coincidentally, the first three helicopters of VMO-6 were just being ferried from Kimpo to Wonsan airfield. Captain Gene W. Morrison recalled landing at Wonsan during the emergency and not even shutting down his helicopter. He received an urgent cockpit briefing, then lifted off immediately for Kojo on a medical evacuation mission.

The sudden violence of the well-coordinated NKPA night attacks had shocked Lieutenant Colonel Hawkins deeply. His reports to division throughout the 28th reflected the concerns of an isolated commander under protracted stress: "Received determined attack . . . from sunset to sunrise by large enemy force," he reported in one message that reached General Smith about 1230. "One company still heavily engaged . . . Have suffered 9 KIA, 39 WIA, 34 MIA probably dead . . . If this position is to be held a regiment is required . . . Shall we hold here or withdraw to North? Send all available helicopters for wounded."

Smith directed Colonel Bowser to send Puller and an additional battalion of the 1st Marines by immediate train to reinforce Hawkins. Smith also arranged for air strikes, destroyer bombard-

## Aerial Medical Evacuation

A dramatic improvement in medical care for combat casualties became evident by the end of the Seoul campaign. According to historian J. Robert Moskin, Navy surgeons operated on 2,484 patients during the fighting for Inchon and Seoul. Only nine of these men died, a remarkable advance in the survival rate of those casualties who made it back to an aid station. Several factors contributed to this breakthrough, but one notable newcomer was the increased use of organic observation aircraft—principally the helicopter—for medical evacuation of severely wounded men.

The use of Marine Corps aircraft to evacuate casualties under fire began as early as 1928 in Nicaragua when First Lieutenant Christian F. Schilt landed his O2U Corsair biplane in the dusty streets of Quilali, a bravura performance, repeated 10 times, that resulted in the rescue of 20 men and a Medal of Honor for the intrepid pilot. Later, during the 1945 battle for Okinawa's Kunishi Ridge, the Marines evacuated hundreds of their casualties to a rear hospital by experimental use of their OY-1 single-engine observation aircraft, which trundled aloft from a dirt road just behind the front lines.

Marine Observation Squadron 6 (VMO-6) had been one of the observation squadrons that evacuated wounded men from the Kunishi Ridge battlefield. In Korea five years later the squadron again supported the 1st Marine Division. While the OY-1s occasionally transported wounded men in 1950, the mission increasingly became the province of the squadron's helicopters, the nation's first wartime use of the new technology.

The VMO-6 pilots flew Sikorsky HO3S-1 observation helicopters during the Seoul campaign. A bench seat behind the pilot could accommodate three passengers, but there was insufficient room in the cabin for a stretcher. To evacuate a non-ambulatory patient, according to historians (and helicopter pilots) Lieutenant Colonel Gary W. Parker and Major Frank M. Batha, Jr., the crew had to remove the right rear window and load the stretcher headfirst through the gap. The casualty's feet jutted out the open window.

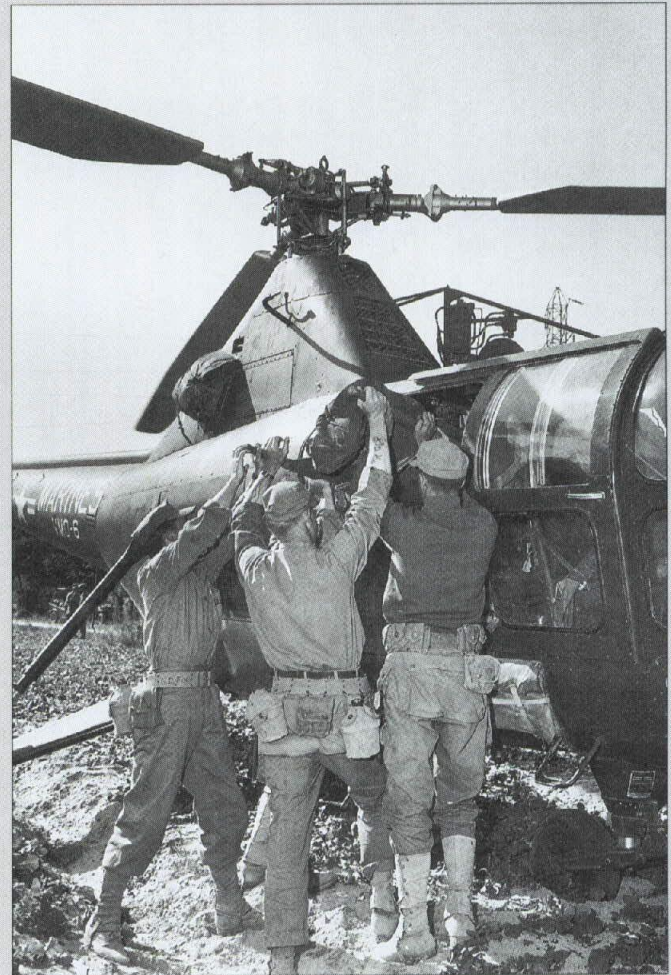
Primitive as this arrangement may have been, the pilots of VMO-6 safely evacuated 139 critically wounded Marines during the Seoul campaign. Most of these men owed their lives to this timely evacuation. An unspoken but significant side benefit to these missions of mercy was their impact on the morale of the Marines still engaged in combat. Simply knowing that this marvelous new flying machine was on call to evacuate their buddies or themselves should the need arise was greatly reassuring.

The proficiency of the VMO-6 helicopter pilots proved reassuring to the fixed-wing pilots as well. A

Marine helicopter had rescued Marine Aircraft Group 33's first downed aviator as early as the second day of the 1st Brigade's commitment to the Pusan Peninsula. Included in Major Robert P. Keller's post-Seoul campaign evaluation of his Black Sheep squadron's role in close air support operations were these comments: "The helicopters have done a wonderful service in rescuing downed pilots under the very guns of the enemy. The pilot should not start out cross country unless he is sure that helicopters are available."

Major Vincent J. Gottschalk's VMO-6 lost two OY-1s and two helicopters to enemy fire during the Seoul campaign. Fortunately, at least, none of the aircraft were transporting casualties at the time. Three months later, the squadron would transition to the Bell H1L-4 helicopter which could carry a stretcher mounted on each skid, in effect doubling the medical evacuation payload. In August 1951, in one of the high points of Marine Corps aviation history, Major General Christian F. Schilt, the hero of long-ago Quilali, took command of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing in Korea.

National Archives Photo (USN) 80-A20546



ment, and a hospital-configured LST to be dispatched to Hawkins' aid.

Hawkins, convinced that the NKPA would return that night in great force, continued to send alarming messages to General Smith, but things had calmed down when Puller arrived with Sutter's 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, at 2230. There were no further attacks by the *10th NKPA Regiment*. Puller was decidedly unsympathetic to Hawkins' concerns (and in fact would replace him in command of 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, with Lieutenant Colonel Donald M. Schmuck a week later).

The next day, Captain Noren led

a patrol south to recover a number of his missing troops who had gone to ground after being cut off during the night. Similarly, Captain George B. Farish, a VMO-6 helicopter pilot on a reconnaissance mission below Kojo, spotted the word "HELP" spelled out in rice straw in an open field, landed warily, and promptly retrieved smart-thinking Private First Class William H. Meister, one of Noren's lost sheep, from his nearby hiding place. The battalion's final count for that bloody night came to 23 killed, 47 wounded, and 4 missing.

On the same day, Captain Barrow led Company A south on a reconnaissance in force, accompanied by a destroyer offshore and a

section of Corsairs overhead. Just as he reached his assigned turnaround point, a Corsair pilot advised him that a large number of enemy troops were digging in several miles farther south. Barrow directed the pilot to expend his ordnance on the target. He did so. Barrow then asked him if he could adjust naval gunfire. "Yeah, I can do that," came the reply. For the next half-hour the destroyer delivered a brisk fire, expertly adjusted by the pilot, who at the end reported many casualties and fleeing remnants. Barrow returned to Kojo without firing a shot, but fully convinced he had avenged Baker Company and taught his unknown opponent a lesson in

*With the Kojo area secured, the 1st Marines, in coordination with Marine Corsairs, move out in reconnaissance in force.*

Gen Oliver P. Smith Collection, Marine Corps Research Center





National Archives Photo (USMC) 127-N-A4553

*The 5th Marines load on board a patched-up train for the move north to Hamhung in pursuit of the retreating North Koreans*

combined arms firepower.

O. P. Smith could illafford to keep Puller and two battalions so far below Wonsan. With the 7th and 5th Marines already on their way far northward towards Hamhung, and an urgent requirement at hand for 3d Battalion, 1st Marines to proceed to Majon-ni, Smith had no Marine infantry units left to cover Wonsan's port, airfield, and road junctions. Members of the 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion and other combat support Marines doubled as riflemen to fill the gaps until Puller's force

returned in early November. The 1st Marine Division, however, would remain widely dispersed, a continuing concern to Smith. Indeed, his three infantry regiments would not be linked up for six weeks, from the administrative landing at Wonsan until the withdrawing columns from the Chosin Reservoir fought their way down to Chinhung-ni during the second week in December.

Other changes were in the wind. On 29 October, General Barr's 7th Division commenced its administrative landing at the small port of

Iwon, another 60 miles above Hungnam. In the dramatic but strategically unsound "Race to the Yalu," two of Barr's units would become the only U.S. forces to actually reach the river. Meanwhile General Almond continued to look for opportunities to exploit the 1st Marine Division's amphibious capabilities. When Puller returned from Kojo, Almond warned him to be ready for an amphibious landing 220 miles northeast of Wonsan. The target was Chongjin, a seaport dangerously near the North Korean border with the Soviet Union.

Colonel Puller wasted little time worrying about another "End Run." Of more immediate concern to him was the commitment of Lieutenant Colonel Ridge's 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, to the defense of the key road junction at Majon-ni, a deployment that would last 17 days and provoke a dozen sharp firefights.

The mountain town of Majon-ni occupied a bowl-like plateau, encircled by higher ground, about 26 miles west-southwest of Wonsan. The roads from Wonsan, Pyongyang, and Seoul intersect here, and the highlands contain the headwaters of the Imjin River. Ridge's battalion arrived on 28 October to provide a screening and blocking force.

The terrain around Majon-ni lent itself more readily to the defense than Kojo, but Kojo had been much more accessible for the Marines. There were no rail lines, and the "highway" from Wonsan was a single-lane road that twisted through mountain passes, switchbacks, hairpin turns, and precipitous dropoffs. The troops called it "Ambush Alley."

In 1978, two Marine generals recalled their experiences as young officers involved in the defense and resupply of Majon-ni. To

Brigadier General Edwin H. Simmons, the Majon-ni mission was a difficult defensive line that had to be covered with a thin perimeter, thus providing 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, with good practice for their similar challenge ahead at Hagaru-ri, the crossroads mountain village situated at the southeastern edge of the Chosin Reservoir. "Majon-ni was a dress rehearsal for what was going to come up for us at Hagaru-ri," he said. For his part, General Robert H. Barrow considered Majon-ni more a precursor for Khe Sanh in 1968, a remote plateau in the mountains "at the end of a long, tenuous supply route in no-man's land."

Elements of the 15th NKPA Division opposed Ridge's battalion in the mountains around Majon-ni. While more disorganized and much less proficient than the 10th

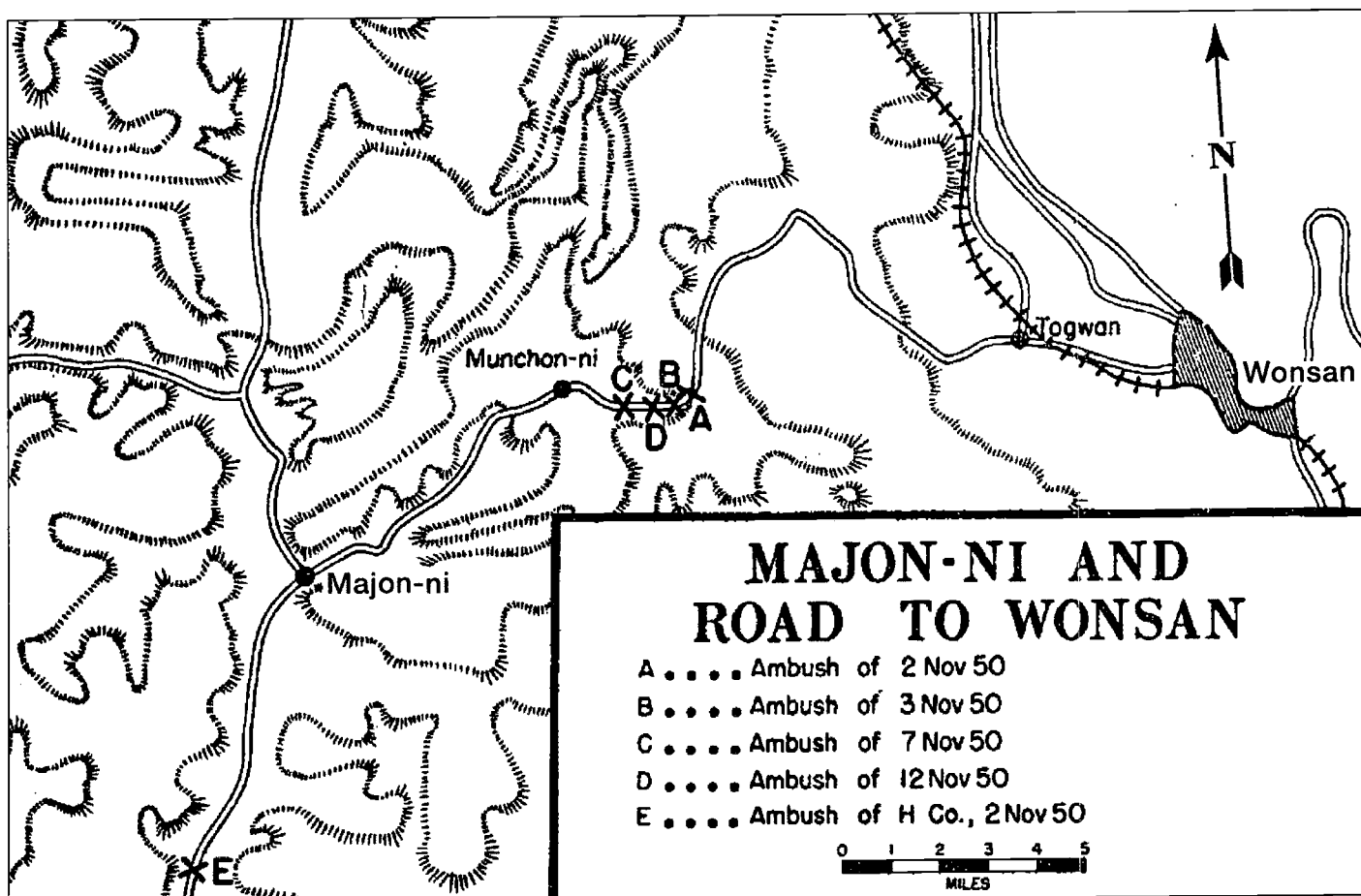
Regiment that had stung Hawkins' 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, so painfully at Kojo, these North Koreans were sufficiently trained fighters to threaten Ridge's perimeter each night and readily interdict the Marine convoys trundling carefully through Ambush Alley.

When Ridge went a week without resupply convoys being able to get through to Majon-ni, he requested an air drop of ammunition, gasoline, and rations. The 1st Air Delivery Platoon packaged 21 tons of these critical supplies into 152 parachutes. These were dropped over the Marine perimeter with uncommon accuracy by Air Force C-47s.

With ambushes occurring more frequently, Puller assigned Captain Barrow's Company A, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, to escort a 34-vehicle convoy from Wonsan to Majon-ni at mid-afternoon on 4

November. Barrow was uncomfortable with both the late start and the slow progress. The North Koreans struck the column with heavy fire late in the afternoon. "They picked a good spot," said Barrow. He called for air strikes through a patchwork network and tried to work his infantry up the steep slopes towards the ambushers. "It soon became apparent that we were not going to be successful . . . and the bad thing was nightfall was approaching." Stymied, and embarrassed by the failure, Barrow ordered the huge 6x6s and Jeeps with trailers to turn around, a harrowing experience under automatic weapons fire. One vehicle went over the side. The Marines formed "a bucket-brigade" to retrieve the injured men.

Back at Wonsan, Captain Barrow dreaded having to report





National Archives Photo (USMC) 127-N-A4492

*Battery H, 11th Marines, runs its guns forward and prepares to go to work in support of the 7th Marines as the regimental combat team moves north from Hambung into the mountains of North Korea.*

his lack of success to Chesty Puller. He found Puller in a school classroom, appropriately seated at the teacher's desk. "Colonel, I have failed you," he said. "No you didn't, old man," Puller growled, not unkindly. "Have a seat." Puller offered Barrow a drink of bourbon, then asked him what he needed to get the convoy through the next day. "More daylight and a forward air controller," Barrow replied.

Barrow departed Wonsan early on the 5th, inspired by an innovative tactic he had devised during the night. The North Koreans, he realized, could hear the trucks laboring up the pass long before they hove into view. He would therefore detach a reinforced platoon to precede the convoy on

foot by several thousand yards—comforting for the convoy, although spooky for Second Lieutenant Donald R. Jones' point platoon.

Private First Class Morgan Brainard was a member of the second fire team in Jones' dismounted advance patrol. After four bends in the road he looked back and saw the far-distant trucks begin to move. "We were then so far ahead, that I couldn't hear their engines, only our labored breathing," he said. "It was a lonely, eerie feeling, forty-two of us plodding up a bleak mountain road by ourselves."

"It worked!" said Barrow. Jones' point team caught the North Koreans cooking rice along the road, totally unaware and non-tac-

tical. "We literally shot our way forward," said Brainard. More than 50 of the off-duty ambushers died in the surprise attack. "We just laid them out," Barrow recalled with obvious pride, adding, "sometimes the simplest solutions are the most successful."

Barrow delivered his convoy to Majon-ni, stayed to help 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, defend the perimeter against a large-scale night attack, then returned to Wonsan the next day, the emptied trucks now laden with more than 600 NKPA prisoners captured by Ridge's battalion. Yet Barrow's success did not end North Korean interdiction of the Marine convoys. They had learned their own lessons from their surprise defeat on 5 November and would fight

smarter in two additional ambushes the following week.

On 10 November, the 3d Korean Marine Corps Battalion reinforced 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, at Majon-ni. The Korean Marines joined their American counterparts in a brief but heartfelt celebration of the 175th Birthday of the U.S. Marine Corps. Ridge's bakers outdid themselves with the resources at hand—an uneven yet ambitiously large cake, smeared with C-Ration jam—but what the hell!

The North Koreans struck the Marine perimeter once more in force the night of 11-12 November, then faded back into the mountains. On the 14th, Lieutenant Colonel Ridge turned over defense of the village to an Army battalion from the newly arrived 3d Infantry Division and led his men back to Wonsan, pleased that 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, had acquitted itself well on such an isolated mission. The battalion sustained 65 casualties defending Majon-ni; another 90 Marines became casualties in

the series of convoy fights along Ambush Alley.

The Majon-ni mission ended three straight months of significant fighting between the Marines and main line elements of the North Korean Peoples' Army. Admirably supported by the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, the Marines had fought well from the start, expanded effortlessly from a small brigade to a full-strength division, executed one of the most difficult amphibious landings in history, and—with the help of their allies and Army elements of X Corps—recaptured an enormous capital city. The resurgence of the Marines' standing within the national security community in Washington was downright dramatic.

But that phase of the Korean War had ended. A new, starkly different, and more troublesome phase had begun. The deceptive promise of "Home by Christmas" seemed abruptly swept away by a bone-chilling wind out of the Taebaek Mountains, out of Manchuria, a har-

binge of an early winter—and perhaps something more ominous. By the time General Smith moved the division command post from Wonsan to Hungnam on 4 November, he had been receiving reports of Red Chinese troops south of the Yalu for 10 days. A patrol from 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, visited the headquarters of the 17th ROK Infantry near Sudong-ni on 31 October and confirmed the presence of prisoners of war from the *124th Division*, Chinese Communist Forces.

Colonel Homer Litzenberg, whose 7th Marines would lead the way into the Taebaek Mountains, warned his troops about the likelihood of a Third World War. "We can expect to meet Chinese Communist troops," he told them, "and it is important that we win the first battle. The results of that action will reverberate around the world, and we want to make sure that the outcome has an adverse effect in Moscow as well as Peiping."

*The 7th Marines, wearing and carrying cold weather equipment, press north into the Taebaek Mountains in pursuit of*

*North Korean forces. A burden now, they would come to depend on this gear in the coming month.*

National Archives Photo (USMC) 127-N-A4524

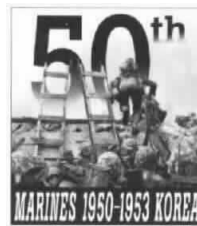


## About the Author

Colonel Joseph H. Alexander, USMC (Ret), served 29 years on active duty as an assault amphibian officer, including two tours in Vietnam and service as Chief of Staff, 3d Marine Division. He is a distinguished graduate of the Naval War College and holds degrees in history and national security from North Carolina, Jacksonville, and Georgetown Universities.



Colonel Alexander wrote the History and Museum Division's World War II 50th anniversary commemorative pamphlets on Tarawa, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa. His books include *A Fellowship of Valor: The Battle History of the U.S. Marines; Storm Landings: Epic Amphibious Battles of the Central Pacific; Utmost Savagery: The Three Days of Tarawa; Edson's Raiders: The 1st Marine Raider Battalion in WW II*; and (with Lieutenant Colonel Merrill L. Bartlett) *Sea Soldiers in the Cold War*. As chief military historian for Lou Reda Productions he has appeared in 15 documentaries for The History Channel and the Arts & Entertainment Network, including a four-part mini-series on the Korean War, "Fire and Ice."



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