

CORSAIRS TO PANTHERS

U.S. Marine Aviation in Korea

by Major General John P. Condon

U.S. Marine Corps, Retired

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Marines in the Korean War Commemorative Series



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The first major surprise of the post World War II years came into play when in late June 1950, the United States found itself responding in crisis fashion to the North Korean invasion of the new republic of South Korea, just four years and nine months after VJ-Day. The nation became involved in Korea as a result of the Cairo and Yalta conferences in which the United States and the Soviet Union agreed to the concept of a free and independent post-war Korea. Included in the agreement was a joint occupation of the country by the two powers, with the Soviets north of the 38th Parallel and the United States south. The concept of the occupation had a general objective of settling down Korea for a period so that it could learn to govern itself as a nation after many decades of Japanese rule. As the United States was painfully learning, however, it soon became apparent that what the Soviets said was one thing and what they intended was quite another with respect to a

free, independent, and democratic Korea. When in 1948, they refused to participate in elections, supervised by the United Nations to form the first National Assembly, the hopes for a united Korea died. The Soviets formed a separate Communist state in their sector, the People's Democratic Republic of Korea. With the elections completed for the National Assembly in the south, the Republic of Korea (ROK) was established and the United States trusteeship in the country came to an end.

On 25 June 1950, the North Koreans attacked with nine well-equipped infantry divisions, spearheaded by one armored division equipped with Soviet-built T-34 tanks. The Republic of Korea's army had been in existence for just about a year and could only oppose the invasion with four lightly equipped divisions and one additional regiment. Needless to say, although there were some spirited but isolated small unit defensive actions, the Republic's forces were no match for the invaders. The North Koreans reached out with rapidly advancing armored columns, moving almost at will during the first four days. Seoul fell on 28 June, and at that time, the ROK army had 34,000 troops missing, although many of them later returned to their units. With the capture of Seoul, the invaders halted to regroup and those ROK forces, which were still intact, fell back through Suwon to

set up some form of new defensive positions. The South Korean government had displaced to Taejeon well to the south when the fall of Seoul became imminent. This state of near collapse was the basic situation faced by the United States and the United Nations in the opening week of the war. It was the

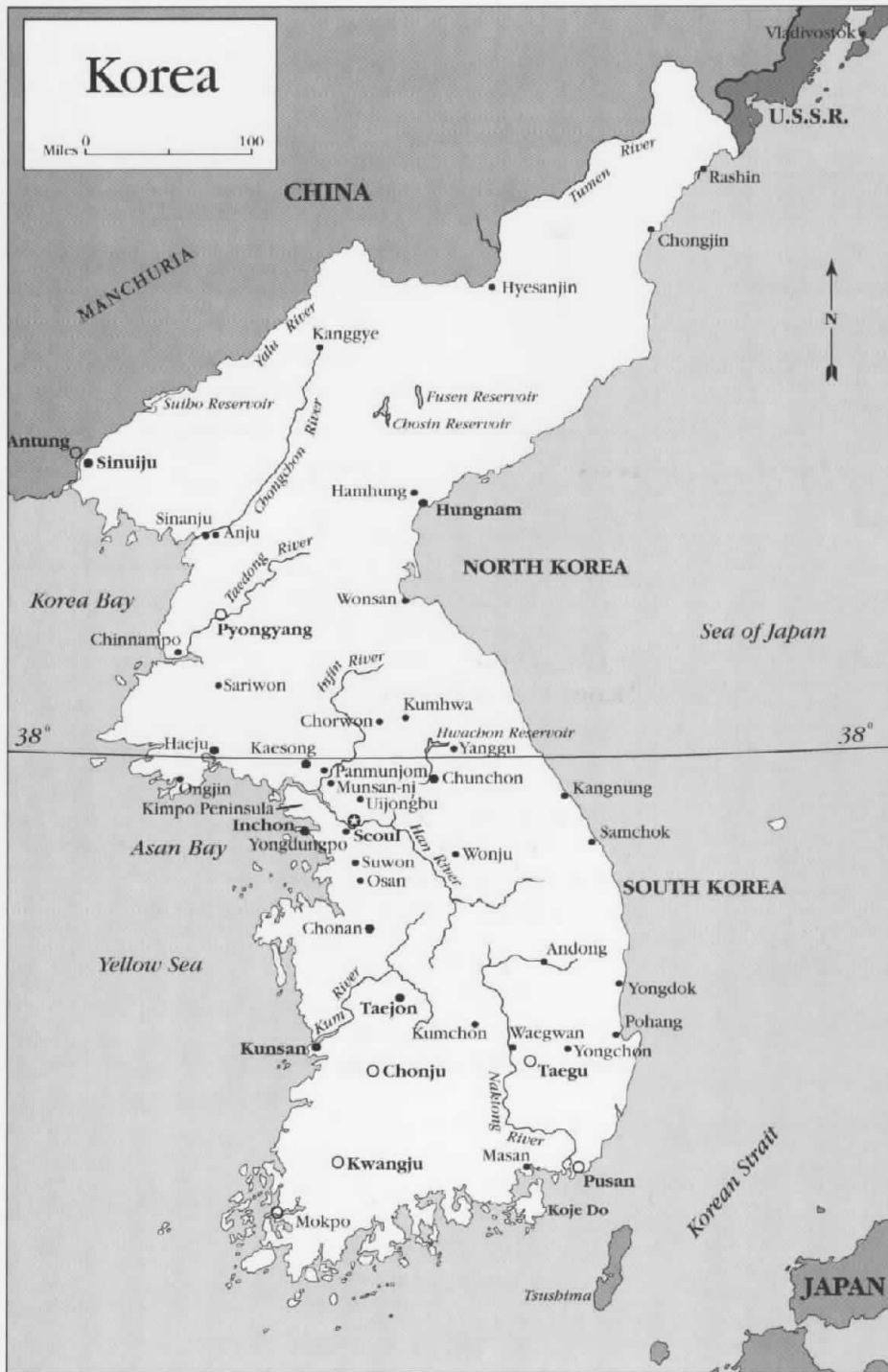
A graduate of the open cockpit and silk scarf era of Marine Corps aviation, BGen Thomas J. Cushman saw service in Nicaragua, Haiti, and the Central Pacific before being named Assistant Wing Commander, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, in June 1950. He commanded the wing's forward echelon, which provided air support for the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade at Pusan, and later served as Commanding General, Tactical Air Group (X Corps) during Inchon and the advance on Seoul.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A2108



ON THE COVER: *After strafing enemy troops positions, a Vought F4U Corsair pilot hunts out a suitable target for his remaining napalm bomb.* Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A133540

AT LEFT: *A Grumman F9F Panther jet is directed into take off position for a raid against enemy positions in North Korea.* Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A43151



the 56 respondents to the United Nations resolution, only three were opposed: the Soviet Union, Poland, and Czechoslovakia.

The United Nations participating pledges were substantial and included aircraft, naval vessels, medical supplies, field ambulances, foodstuffs, and strategic materials. In addition to the Army forces authorized by President Truman, a naval blockade of the entire Korean coast was ordered, and U.S. Air Force units based in Japan were authorized to bomb specific targets in North Korea. It is also important to note that these critical actions met with the wholehearted approval of the American people. Americans also applauded the strong stance of the United Nations, and they repeatedly expressed their thoroughgoing pride in the responses of their nation to the seriously deteriorating international situation.

Marine Brigade

In response to urgent requests for American reinforcements from the Far East Command, and as a result of unit offerings and proposals from the United States, the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade was activated on 7 July 1950. It was an air-ground team built around the 5th Marine Regiment and Marine Aircraft Group 33 (MAG-33), both based on the west coast at Camp Pendleton and Marine Corps Air Station, El Toro, respectively. Brigadier General Edward A. Craig, with Brigadier General Thomas J. Cushman, a renowned and experienced Marine aviator, assigned as his deputy commander, commanded the brigade.

The time and space factors in the activation and deployment of the brigade were, to say the least, something extraordinary. Activated on 7 July, the unit was given

first time that a Soviet-supported state was permitted to go as far as open warfare in their post-World War II depredations, and it constituted a definite showdown between the Communist and non-Communist worlds.

The United States responded to the invasion of South Korea both independently, and through strong support and leadership in a United

Nations resolution condemning the breaking of world peace by the North Koreans. President Harry S. Truman gave General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, Commander in Chief, Far East, the go-ahead to send Army units into Korea from Japan and to take other actions in support of the shocked and shattered ROK forces. It is important to note that of

at the same time a sailing date five to seven days later. In looking back at this first of the post-World War II surprises, it is again important to fully understand what the radical demobilization steps had accomplished. It is impossible to list them all in this short account, but it will suffice to point out that rifle companies were at two platoons instead of three, infantry battalions at two rifle companies

instead of three, and deep cuts in normal logistic back-ups of all types of "ready" supplies of everything from ammunition to field rations were common. It also must be emphasized that normally, after the cutbacks and reductions following World War II, the division-wing teams on both coasts would have been very hard-pressed to deploy one reinforced brigade of regiment-group-sized in 30 days,

let alone the seven days granted in this case. A super performance is simply a classic understatement for the mount-out of the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade to Korea.

In late June 1950, Marine Fighter Squadron 214 was the only Corsair squadron operating from El Toro. Marine Fighter Squadron 323 was in the process of returning to the air station following several

Marine Corps Air Units and Primary Aircraft

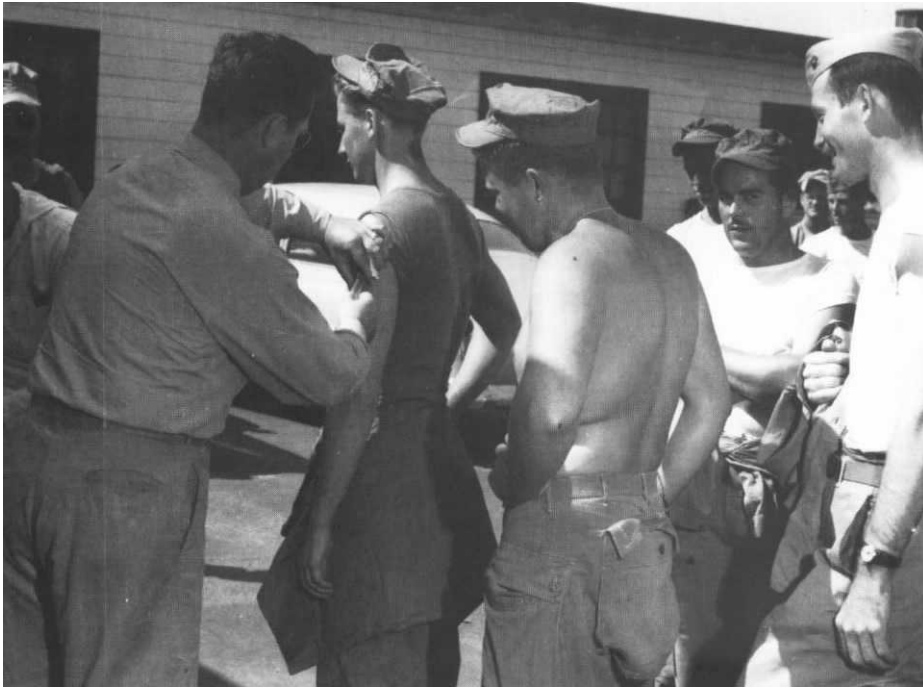
Forward Echelon, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing (July–September 1950)

- Marine Aircraft Group 33
 - Headquarters Squadron 33
 - Service Squadron 33
- Marine Fighter Squadron 214
(Vought F4U Corsair)
- Marine Fighter Squadron 323
(Vought F4U Corsair)
- Marine Night Fighter Squadron 513
(Grumman F7F Tigercat, Douglas F3D Skyknight)
- Marine Tactical Air Control Squadron 2

1st Marine Aircraft Wing (September 1950 – July 1953)

- Headquarters Squadron 1
- Marine Wing Service Squadron 1
- Marine Wing Service Group 17
 - Headquarters Squadron 17
 - Marine Air Base Squadron 17
 - Marine Aircraft Repair Squadron 17
- Marine Aircraft Group 12
 - Headquarters Squadron 12
(Vought F4U Corsair, General Motors TBM Avenger)
 - Service Squadron 12
 - Marine Air Base Squadron 12
 - Marine Aircraft Maintenance Squadron 12
- Marine Aircraft Group 33
 - Headquarters Squadron 33
(Vought F4U Corsair, General Motors TBM Avenger)
 - Service Squadron 33
 - Marine Air Base Squadron 33
 - Marine Aircraft Maintenance Squadron 33
- Marine Fighter Squadron 115
(Grumman F9F Panther)
- Marine Attack Squadron 121
(Douglas AD Skyraider)

- Marine Fighter Squadron 212 (Redesignated Marine Attack Squadron 212 on 10 June 1952)
(Vought F4U Corsair, Vought AU-1 Corsair)
- Marine Fighter Squadron 214
(Vought F4U Corsair)
- Marine Fighter Squadron 311
(Grumman F9F Panther)
- Marine Fighter Squadron 312 (Redesignated Marine Attack Squadron 312 on 1 March 1952)
(Vought F4U Corsair)
- Marine Fighter Squadron 323 (Redesignated Marine Attack Squadron 323 on 30 June 1952)
(Vought F4U Corsair, Vought AU-1 Corsair)
- Marine Attack Squadron 332
(Vought F4U Corsair)
- Marine Attack Squadron 251
(Douglas AD Skyraider)
- Marine Night-Fighter Squadron 513
(Vought F4U Corsair, Grumman F7F Tigercat, Douglas F3D Skyknight)
- Marine Night-Fighter Squadron 542
(Grumman F7F Tigercat, Douglas F3D Skyknight)
- Marine Transport Squadron 152
(Douglas R4D Skytrain)
- Marine Ground Control Squadron 1
- Marine Air Control Group 2
- Marine Tactical Air Control Squadron 2
- Marine Ground Control Intercept Squadron 1
- Marine Ground Control Intercept Squadron 3
- Marine Photographic Squadron 1
(McDonnell F2H-P Banshee)
- Marine Composite Squadron 1
(Douglas AD Skyraider)
- Marine Helicopter Transport Squadron 161
(Sikorsky HRS-1 Helicopter)
- Marine Observation Squadron 6
(Consolidated OY Sentinel, Sikorsky H03S Helicopter, Bell HTL Helicopter)
- 1st 90mm Antiaircraft Artillery Gun Battalion



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A130091

Marines of the wing's forward echelon receive their inoculations in early July at Marine Corps Air Station, El Toro, before leaving for Korea on board the escort carrier Badoeng Strait (CVE 116) and transport General A. E. Anderson (AP 111).

months of training at Camp Pendleton and on board the Essex-class carrier *Philippine Sea* (CV 47) off the California coast. Following its return, the aircraft and men of the squadron quickly prepared to deploy. The Black Sheep of Marine Fighter Squadron 214 likewise were in a high state of readiness, but had been “out of pocket” when the war broke out. The squadron was enroute to Hawaii on board the escort carrier *Badoeng Strait* (CVE 116), having been awarded the privilege of hosting the annual Naval Academy midshipman’s cruise, when it received word of the North Korean invasion of South Korea. It was not long before the squadron’s commanding officer, Major Robert P. Keller, was summoned to Headquarters Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, at Camp Smith. After flying off the carrier, Keller met with Colonel Victor H. Krulak, Lieutenant General Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr.’s chief of staff. With a tone of dead seriousness

only Krulak could project, he asked Keller: “Major, are you ready to go to war?” Keller, reflecting on the training and experience level of the squadron, assured him that the Black Sheep were ready. With no time to enjoy Hawaii, the midshipmen were offloaded and the carrier made a beeline back to California in anticipation of mobilization orders.

The Badoeng Strait (CVE 116) was the carrier home from which the “Death Rattlers” of Marine Fighter Squadron 323 launched their initial Korean combat missions in August 1950.

As can be readily imagined, Camp Pendleton and El Toro were twin scenes of mad confusion as Marines arrived hourly by train, bus, and plane, and “demoth-balled” equipment of all types arrived for marking and packing, literally at a rate measured in tons per hour. “Sleep on the boat” was the order of the day as the date of embarkation at San Diego and Long Beach for the first elements, 12 July, rapidly drew closer. By 14 July, all units were on board assigned shipping and underway westward.

At departure, the total strength of the brigade was 6,534. MAG-33 totaled 192 officers and 1,358 enlisted men, composed principally of the two fighter squadrons, VMF-214 and VMF-323, a night fighter squadron, VMF(N)-513, and an observation squadron, VMO-6. An important and historic component of VMO-6 was a detachment of four HO3S-1 Sikorsky helicopters, hurriedly assigned and moved to El Toro from the helicopter development squadron at Quantico, HMX-1. This was the first time that the United States Armed Services had actually deployed helicopters in a unit mounting out for combat service overseas, although a few had

Marine Corps Historical Center Photo Collection





An F4U Corsair of Marine Fighter Squadron 214 launches from the escort carrier Sicily (CVE 118). In its second major war in five years, as the workhorse of Marine Corps avi-

ation, the "U-Bird" was still considered a first-rate close air support aircraft.

Courtesy of Cdr Peter J. Mersky, USNR (Ret)

been tried out in both the European and Pacific theaters at the end of World War II on an experimental basis. Aircraft strength at deployment added up to 60 Vought F4U Corsairs, eight Consolidated OY "Sentinels," and the four Sikorsky HO3S-1s.

By 16 July, the brigade commander and a key advance party took off by air for conferences and briefings at Honolulu and at the Far East Command in Tokyo. As these meetings progressed and the possibilities of immediate commitment on arrival of the main body came clearly into focus, an original plan to hold the brigade in Japan temporarily was abandoned. This was a result of the deteriorating position of the United Nations Command in Korea, which by the fourth week of the war had drawn into a perimeter-type defense of the port of Pusan at the southern tip

of the peninsula. On 2 August, the brigade debarked at Pusan and on 3 August at 0600, departed Pusan for the front by rail and 50 borrowed Army trucks. MAG-33 shipping had been directed to Kobe when the force reached far eastern waters, and debarkation began there on 31 July. The fighter squadrons were flown off the *Badoeng Strait* to Itami near Osaka, where they were checked for combat by the ground crews and hastily transported overland from Kobe. With just one refresher hop at Itami, VMF-214, now commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Walter E. Lischeid, landed on board the escort carrier *Sicily* (CVE 118) for operations on 3 August, and on 5 August, Major Arnold A. Lund's VMF-323 returned to the *Badoeng Strait* for the same purpose. VMF(N)-513, under the command of Major Joseph H.

Reinburg, was assigned to the Fifth Air Force for control and began shore-based operations from Itazuke Airfield on the southern island of Kyushu. Its mission was to provide night "heckler" operations over the brigade and the Korean combat area generally, while the two carrier-based units would provide close air support. To furnish the essential communications and tactical links for close air support and general direct support to the brigade, on arrival at Kobe a tank landing ship was waiting to reembark Marine Tactical Air Control Squadron 2 (MTACS-2), led by Major Christian C. Lee, and the ground echelon of VMO-6, commanded by Major Vincent J. Gottschalk, for transport to Pusan. The aircraft of VMO-6 were readied at Kobe and Itami and ferried to Pusan by air. Thus the air-ground integrity of the brigade was held

intact as it entered its first combat less than 30 days after activation, a truly remarkable achievement.

Pusan Perimeter Air Support

At the time of the commitment to action of the brigade in early August 1950, the United Nations defense had contracted to a perimeter around the southern-most port of Pusan. It was vital that the perimeter contract no more, since the port was the logistic link to a viable base position in support of a United Nations recovery on the peninsula. In bringing this desirable outcome to reality, the brigade became known variously as the "Fire Brigade," the "Marine Minutemen," and other into the breach sobriquets. In the process of their month-in-the-perimeter employment, the Marines were accorded the honor of restoring the confidence of United Nations troops through destruction of the myth that the North Koreans were somehow

On the afternoon of 3 August, the "Black Sheep" of VMF-214 made their first air strikes against North Korean positions from Chinju to Sachon. Earlier in the day the squadron's 24 planes landed on board the Sicily, then cruising in the Tsushima Straits, following two days of field carrier landing practice and a short flight from Itami Air Force Base, Japan.

Sicily Highlights from 1946 to 1951



Sicily Highlights from 1946 to 1951
The commanding officer of VMF-214, LtCol Walter E. Lischeid, center, and the Sicily's captain, Capt John S. "Jimmy" Thach, seated right, listen intently as returning pilots report on the results of their mission.

invincible. Marine aviation carried its portion of the brigade load in this restoration of pride and stature, once again relying on its ability to operate afloat as well as ashore. Like the deployments on

board the fast carriers in World War II, the basing of VMFs -214 and -323 on board the escort carriers *Sicily* and *Badoeng Strait* once again showed the lasting wisdom of the long-standing commonality policies between naval and Marine aviation.

From *Sicily*, in the form of eight Corsairs, came the first Marine offensive action of the war. Led by Major Robert P. Keller, the squadron's executive officer, the eight VMF-214 Corsairs took off at 1630 on 3 August in a strike against Chinju and the Communist-held village of Sinbanni. Using incendiary bombs, rockets, and numerous strafing runs it was a more than suitable and impressive greeting for the previously almost unopposed North Korean troops. On the following day, 21 additional sorties were flown to help relieve the pressure on the Eighth Army southern flank. These struck at bridges, railroads, and troop concentrations in the Chinju and Sachon areas. With -214 continuing the march from





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A130914

Against a backdrop of rugged Korean terrain, an OY Sentinel light observation aircraft of Marine Observation Squadron 6, piloted by the squadron's commanding officer Maj Vincent J. Gottschalk, spots concentrations of North Koreans for Marine Corsairs to sear with napalm.

the deck of the *Sicily*, VMF-323 joined the fray from *Badoeng Strait* on 6 August with strikes west of Chinju along the Nam River, hitting large buildings and railroad lines with rockets and 500-pound bombs. Because the carriers were so close to the frontlines of the perimeter, the strikes could reach their targets in a matter of minutes at almost any point where support was requested. That the North Koreans realized something new had been added was apparent when on 11 August, -323 teamed up with North American F-51 Mustangs of the U.S. Air Force near Kosong in what became known as the "Kosong Turkey Shoot." In this action, the Corsairs hit a convoy of more than 100 vehicles of a North Korean motorized regiment, a mixed bag of jeeps, motorcycles, and troop-carrying trucks, stopping the convoy at both ends on the road. They got every one with the help of the F-51s. While hitting the jackpot in this manner was not an

every-day occurrence, the daily sorties from the two carriers so conveniently nearby, began to climb in both number and effectiveness all along the length of the entire perimeter. MAG-33 aircraft were constantly orbiting on station over the frontline as the ground forces advanced, and communications within the air-ground team was steady from the Tactical Air Control Parties (TACP) with the battalions, all the way back to the brigade headquarters. The air support system, controlled by the active presence of Marine Tactical Air Control Squadron 2 and VMO-6 at brigade headquarters from 6 August on, worked to the wondrous amazement of the associated U.S. Army and other United Nations units.

The Fifth Air Force exercised overall control of tactical air operations in Korea, but Marine aviation units, as components of an integrated Fleet Marine Force, operated in support of the brigade

as their highest priority, and in support of other United Nations units as a lower priority. The brigade control organization consisted of three battalion Tactical Air Control Parties and one regimental TACP, each consisting of one aviation officer, an experienced and fully qualified pilot, and six enlisted technicians. Each party was equipped with a radio jeep, portable radios, and remoting communications gear. In addition, there were the facilities and personnel of MTACS-2 at brigade headquarters, as well as the brigade air section of the staff, one officer and one enlisted. The air section was responsible for air planning, tactical control, and coordination of supporting aircraft. Lastly, but certainly of no lesser importance, there was also the brigade observation section consisting of the tactical air observer, three gunnery observers, and the light observation and rotary-wing aircraft of VMO-6. When supporting other United Nations forces, Marine air units operated under the Air Force-Army system for tactical air control.

The foregoing gives an abbreviated description of the brigade air support system, which operated very effectively through some of the most rugged fighting of the Korean War. The operations in the Pusan Perimeter basically were divided during the six-week period into three major actions. The first was the counterattack in the extreme southwest which ran approximately from 3 to 15 August, and was known as the Sachon offensive; the second was the First Naktong counteroffensive, from 16 to 19 August; and the third was the Second Naktong from 3 to 5 September. All three, rugged as they were, resulted in thorough defeats for the Communist forces but were not without cost to the

brigade: 170 killed, 2 missing, and 730 wounded. Estimates showed that the brigade had inflicted almost 10,000 casualties in killed and wounded on the enemy units faced in the six weeks of its participation in the perimeter operation.

Throughout these three vital actions the morale and confidence of the United Nations forces facing the North Koreans was restored. Marine air units of the brigade carried their part of the rebuilding process on a daily, and nightly, basis. In addition, Major Vincent J. Gottschalk's VMO-6 established so many "firsts" with its helicopters during the period that it was obvious that a major tactical innovation was in the making. The new steed that Brigadier General Craig, his chief of staff, Colonel Edward W. Snedeker, and G-3, Lieutenant Colonel Joseph L. Stewart, had discovered clearly indicated that the helicopter was fully capable of

working a revolution in command observation, inspection, and staff procedures.

Most importantly, it was apparent from action in the Pusan Perimeter that the Marine Corps air-ground team concept was a winner. The tight knit integration of close air support into the ground scheme of maneuver proved to be devastatingly effective. From 3 August to 14 September 1950, the two squadrons of MAG-33 on board the carriers (VMFs -214 and -323) and the shore-based night fighters of VMF(N)-513, flew 1,511 sorties, of which 995 were close air support missions in response to requests from engaged ground troops.

The strikes by Marine aircraft not only decimated the enemy's forces, but they rekindled the bond between air and ground that characterizes the Marine air-ground team. Ground Marines gained courage from seeing their fellow

Marines in Corsairs swoop in to deliver ordnance oftentimes within 100 yards of the frontlines. The pilots became part of the fight on the ground and as a result gained a sense of pride and accomplishment in helping ground troops accomplish their mission. Captain John E. Barnett, one of the Corsair pilots summed up how aviators felt about their relationship with ground Marines: "With consummate conceit we doubted not that Marines were the best pilots supporting the best infantry, employing the best tactics; a brotherhood non-parallel. Pilots were in awe of the infantry, lavish praise from whom (regarding close air support) fed our ego."

To sum up the air component performance in the perimeter, the words of General Craig said it all: "The best close air support in the history of the Marine Corps. . . outstanding in its effectiveness." And from the envious viewpoint of an adjacent Army infantry regiment:

The Marines on our left were a sight to behold. Not only was their equipment superior or equal to ours, but they had squadrons of air in direct support. They used it like artillery. It was 'Hey, Joe—This is Smitty—Knock the left off that ridge in front of Item Company.' They had it day and night. It came off nearby carriers, and not from Japan with only 15 minutes of fuel to accomplish the mission.

While there was literally no air opposition from the North Korean Air Force because it had been wiped out by the initial U.S. Air Force efforts at the beginning of the war, such accolades in addition to others were pleasant music to Marine aviation and to the brigade

For the first time in any war helicopters were used on the battlefield as liaison aircraft and in evacuating the wounded. Although underpowered and hard-pressed to carry more than a pilot, crew chief, and one evacuee, the Sikorsky HO3S was relatively dependable.

Marine Corps Historical Center Photo Collection



as a whole. The performance of the brigade was a vital factor in stopping the invasion in August. The punishment meted out to the North Korean units was so severe that it set them up for the crushing defeat, which followed in September.

Inchon Landing

The North Korean invasion of South Korea occurred while Lieutenant General Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr., was enroute to Hawaii to take over as Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific. He cut short his trip on 25 June when he received word of the North Korean action and immediately proceeded to San Francisco and then directly to Hawaii. Following a rapid succession of conferences and briefings, he was off to Japan for meetings with the Far East Command. History was truly made in one of these meetings at Far East Command in which General MacArthur and General Shepherd were the major participants. In a sense, it was a reunion between the two because a few years before on New Britain, General Shepherd had been the assistant division commander of the 1st Marine Division when it was under the operational control of General MacArthur. It had long been a plan of MacArthur's that should a serious overrun of any part of his forces occur, he would attempt to recoup through the use of appropriate delay followed by an amphibious landing in the enemy rear. This was the primary subject to be discussed in the 10 July meeting.

The upshot of this historic conference was that following General Shepherd's assurance that the 1st Marine Division could be made available, MacArthur asked



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A1466
So great was his confidence in the Marine Corps Reserve that LtGen Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr., took personal responsibility for promising Gen Douglas MacArthur that the 1st Marine Division with appropriate Marine air could be sent to Korea by 15 September for the landing at Inchon.

the Joint Chiefs of Staff for it, with appropriate air in the form of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing. As it was approved, almost immediately, it was "less the Brigade units" which would revert to the division and wing upon their arrival in the theater. General Shepherd knew full well that the under-strength division could hardly deploy the reinforced 5th Marines to the brigade, let alone field the balance of the division, but he had an abiding and deep faith in the loyalty and performance potential of the Marine Corps Reserve. The Reserve, ground and air, came through like the proverbial gang-busters, and in less than 60 days after receiving the initial orders, both wing and division made the landing at Inchon on 15 September, just 67 days after the 10 July conference in Tokyo.

The response of the Marine Corps Reserve was so much a key

to the success not only of Inchon, but also to the firm establishment of the United Nations effort in Korea. By about 20 July, the exchanges between Far East Command and Washington had settled out that what would be deployed for Inchon would be a war-strength 1st Marine Division and 1st Marine Aircraft Wing. With the strengths of the two being only at 7,779 and 3,733 respectively, there was no way the war-strength manning levels could be reached and maintained without drawing heavily on both the ground and aviation organized Reserve contingents. Division war-strength ran about 25,000 and the wing about 9,500. On 19 July, President Truman authorized the mobilization of the Marine Corps Reserve and things began to move at a record pace. Minimum time warnings went out to all Reserve District Directors, and alerts were given to Camp Pendleton, El Toro, Camp Lejeune, and Cherry Point to expect literally thousands of reservists in a matter of days. The first reservists arrived at Camp Pendleton and El Toro on 31 July, and by utilizing some units and personnel of the 2d Marine Division and 2d Marine Aircraft Wing on the east coast, the 1st Marine Division and the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing were able to realistically consider their scheduled mount-out dates of 10-15 August. Because a very high percentage of the reservists were combat veterans of World War II, only about 10 percent required any form of basic indoctrination and training. This was a key factor, particularly in aviation, since the total time required from commencement of pilot training to operational status was a matter of some two years. To be called up so soon after World War II, was the theme of many a barracks-room and ready-room ballad that sus-

1st Marine Aircraft Wing Leaders

Major General Field Harris

Speaking before a crowded gathering of the Wings Club at the Ambassador Hotel in Washington, D.C., in May of 1945, Major General Field Harris ended his address on Marine aviation in the scheme of National Defense with the words: "We are not an air force. We are a part of an air-ground team. I believe we will ever be a necessary part of our Nation's air-ground-sea team. As always, we will aspire to be a useful and helpful arm of the United States Marines." A little more than five years later, Harris' remarks would ring true. As Major General Oliver P. Smith, Commanding General, 1st Marine Division, wrote to Major General Harris, then commanding the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing in Korea, following the successful breakout from the Chosin Reservoir: "Never in its history has Marine aviation given more convincing proof of its indispensable value to the ground Marines. . . . A bond of understanding [between brother Marines on the ground and in the air] has been established that will never be broken."

Born in 1895 in Versailles, Kentucky, he received his wings at Pensacola in 1929. But before that he had 12 years of seasoning in the Marine Corps that included sea duty on board the *Nevada* and *Wyoming* and tours ashore with the 3d Provisional Brigade at Guantanamo, Cuba, and at Marine Barracks, Cavite, Philippines, and the

Major General Field Harris

Department of Defense (USMC) A310952



Department of Defense (USMC) A30035

Major General Christian F. Schilt

Office of the Judge Advocate in Washington.

After obtaining his gold wings, Harris served with a squadron of the West Coast Expeditionary Force in San Diego, followed by additional flight training and assignments at sea and on shore, including Egypt as assistant naval attaché. During World War II he was sent to the South Pacific where he served successively as Chief of Staff, Aircraft, Guadalcanal; Commander, Aircraft, North Solomons; and commander of air for the Green Island operation. Following the war, he became Director of Marine Aviation and in 1948 was given command of Aircraft, Fleet Marine Force, Atlantic, and a year later, Aircraft, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, and 1st Marine Aircraft Wing at El Toro, California.

His Korean War service as Commanding General, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing was rewarded with both the Army's and Navy's Distinguished Service Medal. Harris returned to the United States in the summer of the 1951 and again became the commanding general of Aircraft, Fleet Marine Force, Atlantic. Upon his retirement in 1954 he was advanced to the rank of lieutenant general. He died in December 1967 at the age of 72.

Major General Christian F. Schilt

Major General Christian F. "Frank" Schilt, Major General Field Harris' replacement as Commanding General, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, brought a vast amount of flying experience to his new post in Korea.

Born in Richland County, Illinois, in 1895, Schilt

entered the Marine Corps in June 1917 and served as an enlisted man in the Azores with the 1st Marine Aeronautical Company, a seaplane squadron assigned to anti-submarine patrol. In June 1919, on completion of flight training at Marine Flying Field, Miami, Florida, he received his wings and was commissioned a Marine second lieutenant, beginning a near 40-year career in Marine Corps aviation.

His initial assignments were to aviation units in Santo Domingo and Haiti, and in 1927, he was assigned to Nicaragua. As a first lieutenant in 1928, he received the Medal of Honor for his bravery and "almost superhuman skill" in flying out wounded Marines from Quilali. Schilt's career pattern during the interwar years consisted of a mix of school and flight assignments.

Prior to the United States entry into World War II, Colonel Schilt was assigned to the American Embassy in London as assistant naval attaché for air, and as such, traveled extensively in the war zones observing British air tactics in North Africa and the Middle East. During the war, he served as the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing's chief of staff at Guadalcanal, was later commanding officer of Marine Aircraft Group 11, and participated in the consolidation of the Southern Solomons and air defense of Peleliu and Okinawa.

In April 1952, on his return from Korea, Schilt became Deputy Commander, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, and the next year he was given control of aircraft in the Pacific command. His last assignment was as Director of

Major General Clayton C. Jerome

MajGen Clayton C. Jerome, USMC



Aviation at Headquarters Marine Corps and upon his retirement in April 1957, he was advanced to four-star rank because of his combat decorations. General Schilt died in January 1987 at the age of 92.

Major General Clayton C. Jerome

Like his predecessor, Major General Clayton C. Jerome had a distinguished flying career.

A native of Hutchinson, Kansas, born in 1901, he was commissioned a second lieutenant in 1922 upon graduation from the Naval Academy. After a year at Marine Barracks, Washington, D.C., he reported to Pensacola for flight training and received his naval aviator's wings in 1925. Foreign service in China, the Philippines, and Guam followed his first duty assignment at Naval Air Station, Marine Corps Base, San Diego.

In the mid-1930s, Jerome became naval attaché for air in Bogota, Columbia, and several other Latin and Central American republics. While serving as naval attaché he earned the Distinguished Flying Cross for his daring rescue of the survivors of a Venezuelan plane crash. Using an amphibious plane, he repeatedly flew over the treacherous jungles of Cuyuni in search of the wreck. After finding it he made two hazardous landings on the narrow Cuyuni River to rescue four survivors.

During World War II, he took part in the consolidation of the Northern Solomons and the Treasury-Bougainville operation as operations officer and later chief of staff to Commander, Aircraft, Northern Solomons. He was later Commander, Aircraft and Island Commander, Emirau, before serving with the U.S. Army in the Philippines. During the Luzon campaign, he commanded Mangaldan Airfield and Marine aircraft groups at Dagupan, directing Marine air support for the Army ground operations.

Postwar duty included command of Marine Corps Air Station, Quantico; duty as Chief of Staff, Marine Corps Schools, Quantico; and simultaneous service as Director of Public Information, Recruiting, and Marine Corps History at Headquarters Marine Corps.

He was serving as Director of Aviation and Assistant Commandant for Air when reassigned as Commanding General, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing in Korea in April 1952.

In January 1953, Major General Jerome reported to Cherry Point, North Carolina, as Commanding General, 2d Marine Aircraft Wing, and Commander, Aircraft, Fleet Marine Force, Atlantic. Two years later he moved to El Toro, becoming the air commander for Fleet Marine Force, Pacific. Retiring in 1959 as a lieutenant general, he died in 1978 at the age of 77.

Major General Vernon E. Megee

A Marine aviator for more than 20 years, Major General Megee assumed command of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing on 9 January 1953.

Born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 1900, he enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1919 after attending Oklahoma A&M College. Commissioned in 1922, Megee served in



1st MAW Historical Diary Photo Supplement, Apr53
Major General Vernon E. Megee

infantry, artillery, and expeditionary billets before undergoing pilot training in 1931. A year before, while quartermaster with the Aircraft Squadrons, 2d Marine Brigade, in Nicaragua, he earned the Navy and Marine

Corps Medal for commendatory achievement while flying as an observer and machine gunner in an attack on a large force of Sandinista rebels.

Receiving his naval aviator's wings in 1932, Megee spent the pre-war decade as a flight instructor at Quantico; student at the Air Corps Tactical School, Maxwell Field, Alabama; and commander of a Marine fighter squadron. In 1940, Major Megee was assigned to the U.S. Naval Aviation Mission to Peru and spent the next three years as a special advisor to that government's Minister of Aviation.

During World War II, he was the first commander of an Air Support Control Unit, which was created specifically to provide close air support for ground troops. In combat operations at Iwo Jima, Megee was said to have told his pilots to "go in and scrape your bellies on the beach" in support of Marines on the ground. Later, at Okinawa, he commanded all Marine Corps Landing Force Air Support Control Units.

After promotion to brigadier general in 1949, Megee was named Chief of Staff, Fleet Marine Force, Atlantic, and after receiving his second star in 1951, he served as Commanding General, Aircraft, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, prior to his assignment in 1953 to command the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing in Korea.

In 1956 he became the first Marine aviator to serve as Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps and Chief of Staff. After having served as Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, he retired in 1959. In retirement, General Megee earned a master's degree from the University of Texas, Austin, and served as superintendent of the Marine Military Academy in Harlingen. He died in 1992 at the age of 91.

tained both ground and aviation troops on the lighter side throughout the conflict. The "two-time losers," as they referred to themselves, put a lot of morale-building humor into Korea, but the factor of overriding importance was that they were well trained, experienced, and seasoned, ground and air.

Any discussion of Inchon must be considered incomplete if it fails to mention the difficult problem the site itself presented to the amphibious planners. First, the tidal variation at Inchon is one of the greatest ranges of rise and fall on the entire Korean coastline, east or west. Secondly, the approach channels to the landing sites essential to successful estab-

lishment of a major force ashore, were not only narrow and winding, but also were through extensive mud flats. The combination of these two factors alone meant that much of the unloading of heavy equipment would be over mud flats at low tide with the amphibious force ships on the bottom until the next tidal change. In order to accommodate to this problem somewhat and also meet the D-Day date of 15 September, and manage to negotiate the very narrow approach channels, it was essential to make the approach during daylight hours on the fall of the tide, thus deriving an assault H-Hour of late afternoon.

While the complexities of Inchon as a site were much dis-

cussed, with sides taken both at Far East Command and all the way back to Washington, General MacArthur held firm in his confidence in the amphibious experts of the Navy and Marine Corps. He believed that any other site or date would not yield the opportunity to quickly cut the North Korean supply lines to their forces in the south. MacArthur was right, and Inchon has achieved its place in history as the most audacious, daring, difficult, risky—and successful—amphibious landing, perhaps of all time.

Air Support Plan

Major General Field Harris, commanding general of the 1st



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A29033
A Marine aviator since 1930 and a veteran of the Guadalcanal, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa campaigns during World War II, Col Frank G. Dailey led the bomb- and napalm-laden Corsairs of Marine Aircraft Group 33 from the Pusan Perimeter to the Chosin Reservoir.

Marine Aircraft Wing, arrived in Tokyo on 3 September, and immediately began to finalize the air support plans for the Inchon operation with Far East Command, the Navy, the Air Force, and the Army. Underlying the air plan was the decision that the sky over the objective area was to be divided between the air units of the Navy's Joint Task Force 7, and those of X Corps. X Corps had been assigned its own organic air under corps control in a manner reminiscent of the Tactical Air Force organization accorded X Army in the Okinawa operation. The command of X Corps tactical air was given to General Cushman who had been the brigade deputy commander to General Craig in the Pusan Perimeter. MAG-33, under Colonel Frank G. Dailey, was designated by the wing as Tactical Air Command X Corps, with principal units being VMFs -212 and -312, in addition to VMF(N)-542 and

VMF(N)-513. Joint Task Force 7 counted on its fast carrier task force, Task Force 77, to gain air superiority in the area, as well as to furnish deep support and interdiction strikes. Close support for the landing was assigned to the task group including the two small carriers, *Sicily* and *Badoeng Strait*, still operating VMFs-214 and -323, which had supported the brigade so well in the Pusan Perimeter.

The 1st Marine Aircraft Wing designated MTACS-2, which had controlled air support for the brigade, to function in that capacity for the landing, and upon the establishment of X Corps ashore, to then continue to control for Tactical Air Command, X Corps.

Assault Phase Air Support

A primary and crucial objective in the Inchon landing was Wolmi-do Island, very close in to the main landing beaches of Inchon. Preparation of Wolmi-do began on 10 September with attacks by VMFs -214 and -323 with bombs, rockets, and napalm. The island was only about 1,000 yards wide and about the same dimension on the north-south axis, except that a long causeway extending to the south added another 1,000 yards to the length of the island. At the end of the causeway, a small circular islet with a lighthouse marked the entrance to the harbor. The main part of the island was dominated by a centrally situated piece of high ground known as Radio Hill. The Corsairs literally blackened the entire island with napalm to the extent that during the second day of attacks, the whole island appeared to be ablaze.

When the air strikes began, First Lieutenant John S. Perrin, a pilot with VMF-214, recalled that several North Korean military vehicles

were flushed out. Evidently the enemy drivers believed that a moving target would be harder to hit. Perrin said that they got their Corsairs as low and slow as they could and literally chased the vehicles up and down streets and around corners in the island's small industrial sector. Eventually all the vehicles felt the wrath of the blue fighters.

While the two carriers were busy with replenishment at Sasebo on the third day of the pre-landing strikes, Task Force 77 took over the preparation effort with extensive bombing attacks, augmented by the Shore Bombardment Group of four cruisers and six destroyers, the latter closing to within 800 yards of the island. In five days of continuous pounding by this combined air and naval gunfire, Wolmi-do was one blasted piece of real estate as the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, prepared to land at Green Beach on the morning of 15 September. Testifying to the effectiveness of the pre-landing preparation, Lieutenant Colonel Robert D. Taplett's battalion had completed their mopping-up operations by noon and its total casualties for the day were 17 wounded. In return, the battalion could count 136 prisoners, 108 enemy dead, and from interrogations of the prisoners, at least 150 more entombed in caves and emplacements throughout the island. During the afternoon of 15 September, from observation posts at the north tip of the island and at the top of Radio Hill, targets were picked out for special attention during the pre-H-Hour bombardment preparation for the landings at Red and Blue beaches at 1730. While the afternoon wore on, VMFs -214 and -323, in addition to three squadrons of Navy AD Skyraiders, alternately blasted Inchon, integrating their strikes with naval gunfire from 1430 right



Sketch by Cpl Ralph H. Schofield, USMCR

Marines charge ashore at Inchon on 15 September. After scaling the seawall, with the aid of ladders, they fan out rapidly to secure the beachhead as Corsairs of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing blast enemy targets in support of the landing.

up to H-Hour. In addition, Task Force 77 kept a continuous strike group of another 12 planes over the objective area to keep any movement of defensive forces toward the beaches at an absolute minimum. With this type and intensity of air and naval gunfire preparation, in addition to the support given the Red and Blue beach landings from Wolmi-do, plus the strong element of surprise carried by the Inchon assault, success of the operation was assured. In view of the very heavy element of risk involved with the hydrographic characteristics of the harbor and the many other departures from normal planning patterns for

an amphibious assault of the magnitude of Inchon, a completely successful outcome was indeed welcome.

During the advance out of the beachhead, which commenced the day following the landing, the air support control system functioned precisely as previously described. On the first day of the advance toward Seoul, the obviously confused North Koreans learned even more about close air support and its effects than they had absorbed in the Pusan Perimeter a few weeks before. While the attack on D+1 had barely gotten underway, just five miles away from the advancing 5th and 1st Marines, six North

Korean T-34 tanks were spotted in broad daylight rumbling along the Seoul-Inchon highway without escort of any kind, apparently ordered out to bust up the landing. An eight plane strike of VMF-214 hit the enemy armor near the village of Kansong-ni with napalm and rockets as 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, applauded from their positions less than two miles away. The Corsairs destroyed two of the T-34s and a third was damaged, but the North Korean crews abandoned some of the tanks and tried to take shelter in huts near the side of the road, which were promptly napalmed by the strike. This threw up large quantities of smoke and



Department of Defense Photo (USA) SC348504

A curious Marine passes three destroyed North Korean T-34 tanks five miles east of Inchon. The rocket-laden Corsairs of VMF-214 knocked out the tanks, part of a group of six ordered to break-up the landing.

led the pilots to believe that all six tanks had been destroyed, so they switched to other targets in the beachhead area.

Destruction of the tanks came at a price. Captain William F. Simpson, Jr., a pilot with VMF-214 was killed. Fellow pilot Captain Emmons S. Maloney recalled that Simpson "got so involved in it, hitting these tanks coming up, that, he almost flew straight into the tank. By the time he realized he was too low, it was too late to pull out."

Shortly after, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, with a tank escort, came into Kansong-ni and as they were coming into the position, surprised three of the remaining T-34s, which were promptly destroyed by the escorting M-26 Pershing tanks. The close contacts between air and ground, as typified by this example, permitted the continuous and synergistic employment of the capabilities of the air-ground team during the advance to Seoul and beyond.

To briefly summarize all aspects of the Inchon landing, a quote from Rear Admiral James H. Doyle, the veteran amphibious group commander, does the job nicely:

In a destroyed hanger at Kimpo Airfield, Marines found one of several near-flyable North Korean Soviet-built aircraft. Captured by 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, Marines engineers quickly made the airfield operational with temporary repairs, ready to receive elements of MAG-33.

The assault itself was successful only through the perfect teamwork that existed between the participating Naval and Marine elements. . . . Only the United States Marines through their many years of specialized training in amphibious warfare, in conjunction with the Navy, had the requisite know-how to formulate the plans within the limited time available and execute those plans flawlessly without additional training or rehearsal.

Kimpo Airfield

One of the key objectives of the assault phase and the advance toward Seoul was the capture of Kimpo Airfield, the major air installation of the city, about seven miles west on the other side of the Han River from Seoul. While still in the relatively confined operating areas of the assault phase of the operation, the forces assigned could meet air support require-

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A3226





Gen Oliver P. Smith Collection, Marine Corps Research Center
Tactical Air Commander, X Corps, BGen Thomas J. Cushman, USMC, right, and his chief of staff, Col Kenneth H. Weir, USMC, meet with the commanding general of the Fifth Air Force, MajGen Earle R. Partridge, USAF, left, at Kimpo Airfield. While the wing headquarters remained in Japan, its task was to furnish administrative and logistical support to Cushman's command and MAG-33 during the Kimpo air operations.

ments. As the objective areas widened and expanded with the advance, however, it was essential to bring in more shore-based aviation to meet the demand quickly and with optimized dispatch on a constantly broadening front. The field was captured and declared secure in the mid-morning of 18 September. It was in such good shape after the assault that it was possible to almost immediately move in the first operating units. The first aircraft to land officially at Kimpo was an H03S helicopter of VMO-6, piloted by Captain Victor A. Armstrong, which brought in General Shepherd and his G-3, Colonel Victor H. Krulak, to confer with General Craig, who had just arrived by jeep. Later in the afternoon, Generals Harris and Cushman also arrived to make final plans for the deployment of the Marine squadrons from Japan and those that would fill out MAGs -33 and -12 for the follow-on operations.

Returning to the Sicily after making the first landing at Kimpo Airfield, 1stLt John V. Haines points out the damaged section on his Corsair which caused the unscheduled landing to his squadron commander, LtCol Walter E. Lischeid. LtCol Lischeid would die six days later when his Corsair was shot down over the western suburbs of Seoul.

National Archives Photo (USN) 80-G-420281



On 19 September, Tactical Air Command X Corps, General Cushman, established his headquarters at Kimpo, and was quickly followed by Marine Ground Control Intercept Squadron 1, MTACS-2, and VMO-6. The first fighter squadron of MAG-33 to check in was Lieutenant Colonel Max J. Volcansek, Jr.'s VMF(N)-542 with five Grumman F7F Tigercats landing late in the afternoon of the 19th. They also flew the first combat mission from the field early the next morning when they destroyed two locomotives near Seoul. Corsairs of Lieutenant Colonel Richard W. Wyczawski's VMF-212 and Lieutenant Colonel J. Frank Cole's VMF-312 landed shortly after -542 and also got into action on the 20th.

During the transition of the squadrons assigned to MAG-33



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A130104

The Corsairs from VMF-312 take off from Kimpo Airfield as they clock attacks on retreating North Korean forces. fast as they could be refueled and rearmed in around-the-

from MAG-12 in Japan, the operational burden of Marine air support was handled entirely by the two carrier-based Corsair squadrons, VMF-214 and VMF-323, now administratively assigned to MAG-12. Also supporting the displacement of the division-wing team into the Korean peninsula was Major Joseph H. Reinburg's VMF(N)-513, still operating from Itazuke Air Force Base in Japan.

The flexibility of Marine aviation in supporting a forward displacement of such magnitude with hardly a break in the continuity of operations is well illustrated in the rapid establishment of Tactical Air Command X Corps at Kimpo. Once again, the value of commonality between Marine and Naval aviation was effectively demonstrated in the coverage, without a break, of air support requirements of the 1st Marine Division, utilizing the two carrier-based squadrons. Regarding the capture of Kimpo, Lieutenant General George E. Stratemeyer, Commander, Far East Air Forces, had this to say to Major General Oliver P. Smith, the commanding general of the 1st Marine Division: "I want to take this opportunity of expressing my admiration and gratification for the manner in which elements of your Division recently captured Kimpo

Airfield and so secured it as to make it available for use by Far East Air Forces and Marine Corps aircraft in shortest possible time."

Control of air support passed from the Amphibious Force Commander to MTACS-2 ashore on D+2 when the landing force commander (Major General Oliver P. Smith, Commanding General, 1st Marine Division) declared he was ready to assume control. Requests for close air support increased rapidly as the enemy recovered from the initial shock of the assault. For example, on 18-19 September, VMFs -323, -214, and -513 flew a total of 50 close support sorties, delivering napalm, rockets, and 500-pound bombs against troop concentrations in front of the 1st Marines, who were finding the going a bit tougher in the vicinity of Sosa on the Inchon-Seoul highway. In addition, -513 flew a total of 15 daylight close support missions during the period 17-19 September for Army units along the Pusan Perimeter, where the accompanying breakout to the north and west was being initiated.

With Kimpo in hand, the next major objective became the forced crossing of the Han River and the taking of essential key terrain from which to launch the assault on Seoul. MAG-33 and MAG-12 made

their principal contributions to these major endeavors by steadily and rapidly increasing their strengths and capabilities at Kimpo, and through strikes against redeployment and reinforcing moves by the North Koreans attempting to improve the defenses of the city. Logistically, there was a vehicle shortage for the movement of aviation gasoline, ammunition, and oil from the port dumps at Inchon and Ascom City to Kimpo, but a timely offer from the Far East Air Force's Combat Cargo Command solved the problem. During the week of 18-24 September, the Command hauled a total of 1,545 tons of these vital aviation supplies in from Japan. Once again the theorem that the farther from Washington, the greater the inter-Service cooperation was proven, just as it was in the South Pacific a few years before. In addition to this air effort, about 1,450 tons were trucked to Kimpo from the port during the same period. Also, Marine Transport Squadron 152 flew in spare parts and urgently needed ground equipment from Japan or wherever it could be made available, practically around-the-clock.

The crossing of the Han was assigned to the 5th Marines in the vicinity of Haengju, and after an

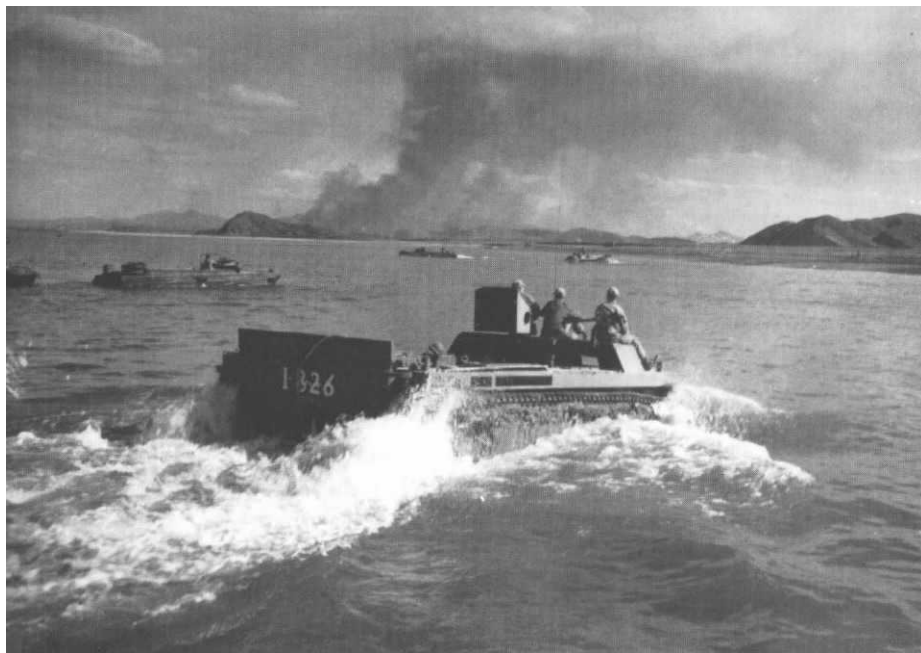


Photo by Frank Noel, Associated Press

Marine amphibious tractors plow across the muddy Han River as the planes of Marine Aircraft Groups 12 and 33 provide close support for the 1st and 5th Marines in their assault toward the South Korean capital.

abortive attempt during the night of 19 September; the 3d Battalion accomplished it during daylight hours on the 20th. Four Corsairs of VMF-214 provided supporting fires against a key hill from which the North Koreans were directing accurate fire at the crossing tracked landing vehicles. As the assault on this hill continued, the Corsairs reported enemy in numbers hastily evacuating with strafing Marine aircraft in full pursuit. The three primary objectives were secured by mid-morning and the advance down the north bank of the river toward Seoul began immediately. The general plan was for the 5th Marines to continue the advance toward Seoul and to seize vantage points in support of the 1st Marines crossing at Yongdungpo. Yongdungpo, the industrial area of the city, was situated on the south bank of the Han on a large sandspit. The fighting on the north bank and in the attack on Yongdungpo both served notice to the division that it was going to be a "to the last man"

defense of the city. By the 24th, after an extremely severe minute-to-minute three days of intensive battling, night and day, the 1st Marines was able to make the crossing and the battle for Seoul was underway.

Marines of the Second Platoon, Company G, 5th Marines, clean snipers out of a residential section of Seoul. Due to the confined nature of much of the fighting within the city, Marine close air support was used sparingly and at deeper distances from the advancing troops.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A3365



Flying Sergeants: Enlisted Marine Aviators

One area where the Marine Corps was probably alone among the aviation Services was the degree it used enlisted pilots, especially in combat. Enlisted pilots were not new. France in World War I and the Axis powers, Germany, Japan, and Italy, in World War II made considerable use of their enlisted aviators. The Royal Air Force would have been in even worse straits during the Battle of Britain in 1940 had it not been for its sergeant-pilots. For the most part, however, the United States required its pilots to be commissioned officers and, with few exceptions, that is the way it continues to be.

The Navy had instituted its Naval Aviation Pilot (NAP) designation in 1919 because of a pilot shortage. The Marines, too, authorized selection of enlisted members to become pilots and First Sergeant Benjamin Belcher was the first Marine NAP in 1923.

With the country's hurried and somewhat unexpected entry into World War II, the need for pilots transcended the niceties of rank and tradition. Therefore all the Services, at one time or another during the war, made use of enlisted pilots, sometimes elevating them to commissioned rank later. Marine ace Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth A. Walsh, who scored 21 kills and earned the Medal of Honor during the war, was an enlisted pilot until he was commissioned in 1942.

The Marine Corps probably had the largest number of noncommissioned aviators (131 in 1942), and not in second-line transport squadrons; many of these NAPs later flew helicopters and jets in very heavy action in Korea. Flying sergeants flew Corsairs and Tigercats at Pusan and Chosin, Panthers in close air support against the Chinese, and OYs on dangerous artillery-spotting missions.

Technical Sergeant Robert A. Hill accumulated 76 combat missions as an OY pilot, earning the moniker "Bulletproof" after coming home in planes that were more holes than aircraft. He received a Distinguished Flying Cross for evacuating wounded Marines near Chosin under heavy enemy fire. Marine NAPs piloted several of the R4D transports that also evacuated wounded from Hagaru-ri and Koto-ri during the Chosin breakout.

But the jet pilots were the glamour boys and NAPs were among the first Marine jet pilots, taking their training in Lockheed TO-1s along with their commissioned squadron mates. The training met some resistance from senior squadron commanders, a few of whom did not want enlisted pilots flying their new jets. NAPs were not allowed to train in jets until 1949. This provided a cadre of experienced and motivated personnel to draw upon during the action in Korea.

This somewhat confusing situation had the added facet that several now-enlisted NAPs had been commissioned lieutenants in World War II. However, after mus-



National Archives Photo (USN) 80G-428028

The flying sergeants of VMF-212 on board the light carrier Bataan (CVL 29). Standing from left to right are: TSgt Gail Lane, MSgt John J. McMasters, MSgt Clyde B. Casebeer, and seated from left to right, MSgt Billy R. Green, MSgt Donald A. Ives, and MSgt Norman E. Payne, Jr.

tering out in 1945 and 1946, many of the former Corsair drivers regretted their decision to leave the active Marine Corps; several missed flying such powerful aircraft as the tough F4U. The Corps also found itself short of qualified aviators to fly its new jets and to man its remaining squadrons.

A program was developed whereby former Marine officer aviators could return as master sergeants (E-7 was the highest enlisted rating at the time), if they re-upped 90 days or less after leaving active duty. After the 90-day limit, the former aviator could rejoin as a technical sergeant, a grade below that of master sergeant.

When VMF-311 brought its F9F Panthers to Korea, several of its pilots were enlisted aviators. Master Sergeant Avery C. Snow was the first NAP to complete 100 combat missions in a jet. Snow had been a captain with Marine Torpedo Bomber Squadron 232 during World War II.

One specialized squadron that made heavy use of its NAPs was Marine Photographic Squadron 1 (VMJ-1), established on 25 February 1952, flying modified McDonnell F2H-2P Banshees with a long nose to accommodate several reconnaissance cameras. VMJ-1 established an enviable record in Korea. Several of its pilots, who were specially trained volunteers, were enlisted men who could double as lab technicians if the situation warranted. Squadron crews flew 5,025 sorties, shooting 793,012 feet of film, one-third of all United Nations photo reconnaissance output, and at times, 50 percent of all Far East Air Force intelligence missions. However, even with this outstanding record, the Banshee drivers of VMJ-1 could not respond to all requests, and as such, overall reconnaissance requirements suffered throughout the war, primarily because of a lack of assets—mainly planes, pilots, and trained photo interpreters. Real-time imagery for field commanders and their units was not available at times when it was most needed. This problem, although well known and accepted, especially by the ground units, continued through Vietnam, and even into the Gulf War.

Five master sergeant NAPs of VMJ-1 pose by one of their Banshees. From left to right are: MSgt James R. Todd, MSgt Samuel W. Cooper, MSgt Lee R. Copland, MSgt Marvin D. Myers, and MSgt Lowell L. Truex. As a second

Aerial photo reconnaissance is one of the most exacting and dangerous jobs in all military aviation. The “recce” pilot must be more than just a good pilot; that is just a base from which to start. He must be a crackerjack navigator and know his camera systems inside and out, their capabilities and their limitations. And he must be resourceful, as well as have an inexhaustible supply of courage. Sometimes these last qualities are all that enable him to bring the film home and successfully complete his mission.

Most jet reconnaissance aircraft were unarmed, relying upon their speed to get them home before being intercepted. During World War II, there were no specifically dedicated reconnaissance aircraft, merely modified fighters, which had cameras stuck in the most convenient space, sometimes behind the pilot in the cockpit, or below him in the belly. The F6F Hellcat and P-51 Mustang are examples of such modification. Usually, these aircraft retained most, if not all, their machine gun armament and could therefore fight their way to and from the target. During Korea, however, the dedicated photo-Banshees of VMJ-1 were toothless and needed

lieutenant with VMF-224 during World War II, Truex shot down a Japanese “George” fighter during an engagement off Okinawa.

Courtesy of MSgt Lowell L. Truex



escorts. Sometimes another Banshee would go along, both as an escort and sometimes to ensure the coverage of the target with another camera. Air Force F-86s were sometimes called upon to shepherd the “recce” pilot. And sometimes, the photo pilot found himself alone.

In 1952, Master Sergeant Lowell T. Truex had made his photo runs against installations near the Yalu River, thinking that his F-86 escort would look out for any Communist fighters, which might try to come after him. However, as he looked around he found that the Sabres were nowhere to be seen, and he also spotted a gaggle of MiG-15s taking off across the river. Hurriedly, he finished his photo runs and ran for home. He found later, that the F-86s had been watching from above, had the MiGs in sight, and were ready to jump the Chinese fighters if they come after Truex. Recalling his time with VMJ-1, Truex said:

My memories of the photo unit, which became a squadron during my tour, and all the plankowners, are good ones. We were completely self-contained and operated with field equipment from the well-point, water tank to the generators. The technicians were all superior guys, who worked with energy and diligence.

While standing squadron watches, besides flying their regular missions, the NAPs were also required to work as division officers in the squadron photo lab and on the flight line. There was also the need to brief escort pilots, who were often Air Force F-86 pilots. The Sabre pilots did not always appreciate being briefed by an enlisted aviator, and occasionally made things difficult for their Marine compatriot. In Master Sergeant Truex's case, he had to submit to annoying identification exercises before he was allowed to conduct his brief. “I had to be verified,” he recalled, “and they wouldn't let me into their briefing room without identification. But, I briefed the Air Force pilots precisely, even though some of them took a casual attitude about escorting a Marine reconnaissance pilot.”

The haughty Sabre pilots tended to look down on the big, blue Banshee their Marine charges flew. How could it compare with their shiny, silver F-86s? As Master Sergeant Truex again recalled:

They underestimated the Banshee's speed and climb, as well as the intensity our mission required. With our small J-34 engines and big tip tanks, our F2Hs had superior range. Although their F-86s looked good, and the Air Force *did* take care of us—and we certainly appreciated their presence—they usually binged before we were finished. We usually flew back alone.

Master Sergeant James R. Todd was VMJ-1's high-mis-

sion man, completing 101 photo missions before rotating home. Todd flew 51 reconnaissance missions in Banshees, 10 in F9F-2Ps, 23 in F7F-3Ps, 13 in F4U-5Ps, and 4 escort missions in F4U-4Bs. As he recalled: “The F4U-4B was used for armed escort only. The rest of the time, we relied on a thirty-eight pistol, a can of film and a lot of speed.”

Like many of the enlisted aviators, Todd had been commissioned a second lieutenant in World War II, although he had just missed seeing combat service when the war ended, having spent much of his post-wing time as an instructor. He was mustered out in September 1946, but returned in November. He resigned his first lieutenant's commission, raised his hand as a private, then was immediately advanced to master sergeant and sent to El Toro and then to Pensacola. Arriving at the Florida air station, he joined other re-enlistees at the Naval School of Photography, where they learned the art of aerial reconnaissance. The training was to stand them in good stead in the coming years. By 1950, Todd and his friends had gained a lot of experience in Corsairs and Tigercats.

In September 1951, they were sent to Korea to supplement the meager photographic assets at K-3 (Pohang). At the time the Marines flew F7F-3Ps and F4U-5Ps. But Todd managed to check out in the F9F-2P, and thus, when VMJ-1 was commissioned the following February with brand-new McDonnell F2H-2P Banshees, he was a natural to slide into the new jet's cockpit. For a while, though, the squadron operated five different types: F7F-3P, F4U-5P, F4U-4B (for escort), F9F-2P, and F2H-2P. The props and Panthers remained until April 1952.

Several of VMJ-1's enlisted aviators also worked in the squadron's photo section, interpreting mission film. Although the squadron was administratively under MAG-33 and 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, it was the Air Force at K-14 (Kimpo) that tasked the targets, which was in keeping with the agreement with the Fifth Air Force. Occasionally, the 1st Marine Division could call in a requirement, but for the most part, Fifth Air Force called the shots.

Two MiGs near Chosin set on one of Todd's squadron mates, Master Sergeant Calvin R. Duke, who laid claim to being the oldest Marine NAP in Korea. In a dogfight that went from 10,000 feet to 30,000 feet, Duke outmaneuvered the Communist fighters and ran for home at 600 miles per hour.

Enlisted aviators were an integral part of the Marine Corps' capability. However, by Vietnam, there were only a few NAPs on active duty, and fewer still actually involved in flying duties. Some of these pioneers served with distinction throughout Vietnam. But by 1973, only four NAPs were still on active service with the Marines, and all four were simultaneously retired on 1 February 1973, closing a colorful era in naval aviation and Marine Corps history.

bombs only 100 yards from the attacking Marines, enabling them to seize the high ground. On the same day, to further illustrate the intensity of the air support effort, VMF-212 set a squadron record for the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing for combat operations by flying 12 missions and a total of 46 single-plane sorties. When refueling, rearming, and mechanical check times are considered, this became a rather remarkable achievement under the more or less "primitive" conditions of the first five days at Kimpo Airfield after moving in from Japan.

During the difficult and very heavy fighting in the city, there were many occasions where close air support could be called in with effect. But because of the confined nature of much of the action, the preponderance of air support was rendered at deeper distances from the advancing troops. VMO-6 helicopters and OYs rendered yeoman service in evacuating wounded, flying constant observation missions, and in providing helicopter communication, conference, and observation flights for the troop commanders.

By 28 September, the intensive fighting in the city was drawing to a close. The newly arrived 7th Marines joined the 1st and 5th Marines on the left after the assault on the city began on the 24th, and things began to move out with dispatch. By the 28th, the 5th Marines, according to plan, had been placed into division reserve and the 7th was preparing to push off in pursuit of the North Koreans fleeing the city toward Uijongbu, 10 miles to the north. On the 29th, the 1st Marines were to establish blocking positions about three miles east of the city and the 5th was assigned a similar mission to the northwest at Suyuhyon. These missions were carried out with rel-

atively minor difficulty, as the North Korean resistance appeared to be collapsing.

The 7th Marines moved out for Uijongbu early on 1 October and ran into firm resistance about half way to the objective. The developing firefight exposed the enemy positions and enabled VMF-312 Corsairs to work them over heavily during the remainder of the day. The advance was renewed the second day and again -312 was busy around-the-clock in support of two battalions forcing their way through a tough defile on the main road, essential for tank and heavy vehicle passage. In addition to the close support missions, the Corsairs caught eight trucks in convoy and destroyed seven in one attack. It was a heavy day all around and two Corsairs were lost to North Korean anti-aircraft fire, but one landed in friendly territory and the pilot was recovered in good shape. On the third day, with the progress that had been made to that point, one battalion was assigned to each side of the road to mop up while the third passed through on the road straight for Uijongbu. It soon became apparent that the enemy was in full flight, but the 7th Marines was in Uijongbu by afternoon. Establishment of the blocking position there marked the last large-scale fight of the Inchon-Seoul operation. The supply lines of the North Korean invading forces had been cut totally and the Inchon landing had crushed the North Korean army.

With the end of this phase of the war, U.S. Army and Republic of Korea Army units began to relieve the Marine forces of their area responsibilities. Division units were issued orders for movement to staging areas in Inchon and all were in place by 7 October to mount out for what looked like a

follow-on amphibious assault on the east coast.

A few of the major highlights drawn from the operation will suffice to summarize the division-wing performance: (1) Expansion from a reduced peace strength to a reinforced war strength, less one regimental combat team, was completed in 15 days; (2) Movement of more than 15,000 personnel, organic heavy equipment, and partial resupply from San Diego to the Far East Command began in less than three weeks after the expansion order was issued; (3) Unloading, reembarkation, and combat loading for the Inchon landing was done at Kobe, Japan, in seven days, including two days lost to a typhoon in the Kobe area; (4) The 1st Provisional Marine Brigade was disengaged from active combat in the Pusan Perimeter at midnight on 5 September, moved to Pusan, and outloaded in combat shipping in less than seven days; (5) A successful assault landing was executed at Inchon on 15 September, under some of the most adverse hydrographic conditions in the history of amphibious operations; (6) The force beachhead line, approximately six miles from the landing beaches, was seized within 24 hours of the main landings; (7) Kimpo Airfield, one of the finest in the Far East, was captured 50 hours and 35 minutes after H-Hour; (8) The Han River was crossed, without major bridging equipment, and Seoul was seized 12 days after the Inchon landing; and (9) The effectiveness of the Marine air-ground team and close air support doctrine was reaffirmed with outstanding success.

Two more days of fighting remained for the squadrons of MAGs -12 and -33 at Kimpo after the relief of the ground units. During the 33-day period from 7

September to 9 October, the five squadrons flew a total of 2,774 sorties, most of them being in close support of infantry units. The accolades from all units supported under the Marine air support control system were many, and welcome, but one from the division artillery commander and fire support coordinator of the Army's 7th Infantry Division was particularly noteworthy. As Brigadier General Homer W. Kiefer said: "Allow me to reemphasize my appreciation for the outstanding air support received by this division. The Marine system of control . . . approaches the ideal and I firmly believe that a similar system should be adopted as standard for Army Divisions."

During the period of the Inchon-Seoul operation, 15 September-7 October, the 1st Marine Division suffered losses of 415 dead, of whom 366 were killed in action and 49 died of wounds; six were declared missing in action and 2,029 were wounded in action, for a total of 2,450 battle casualties. The division took 6,492 North Koreans prisoner and the estimates of total casualties inflicted on the enemy added up to 13,666, most of whom were counted dead on the battlefield. These figures represent a ratio of better than 8 to 1, a thoroughly commendable performance considering the speed with which the air-ground team was put together and deployed.

Chosin Reservoir

Before the end of the Inchon-Seoul operation, when it became clear that the effect of the landing was a total rout of the North Koreans, the Commander in Chief, Far East, was formulating plans for the follow-up. With much prudence and caution emphasized

from both Washington and the United Nations regarding the possible entry of either Soviet or Chinese Communist forces into Korea, it was decided that the United Nations Command could conduct pursuit operations beyond the 38th Parallel into North Korea. Concern over the possible outbreak of a general war remained strong, however, and the authority for General MacArthur to utilize his forces north of the 38th was burdened with several limitations. Briefly, there could be no entry of other than Republic of Korea forces if there was a clear indication of either Soviet or Chinese entry. Also, there could be no attack of any type against any portion of either Chinese or Soviet territory, including the use of Naval or Air forces. Further, only South Korean forces would be utilized in those provinces of North Korea bordering on the Soviet Union or Manchuria. It is interesting to note that in spite of these qualifications, on 29 September Secretary of Defense George C. Marshall included the following in a message to MacArthur: "We want you to feel unhampered tactically and strategically to proceed north of the 38th parallel." Coming so soon after the world-shaking experiences of World War II, there was justifiable cause for concern, but limitations and cautions over and above normal prudence certainly added much to the difficulties of the decisions faced by MacArthur as the move into North Korea was being executed.

Generally, the plan was for Eighth Army, commanded by Lieutenant General Walton H. Walker, USA, to advance along the Kaesong-Sariwon-Pyongyang axis; the II ROK Corps in the center along the Kumhwa-Yangdok-Sunchon axis; and the I ROK Corps up the east coast direct to

Wonsan. The 1st Marine Division would make an assault landing at Wonsan and the Army's 7th Infantry Division would follow ashore in an administrative landing. After establishment ashore at Wonsan, X Corps, under the command of Major General Edward M. Almond, USA, would then advance west to Pyongyang, joining up with Eighth Army. The entire force would then advance north to two phase lines, the second being along the general line Songjin in the east, southwest to Chongju on the west coast. Only South Korean forces would advance beyond the second phase line, in keeping with MacArthur's restrictions. Eighth Army would cross the 38th Parallel on 15 October and the Wonsan landing was set for 20 October.

Wonsan Landing

As has been seen before in military operations, surprise comes in many different packages, and Wonsan indeed had its share. While the division was in the throes of feverishly meeting its tight combat loading schedules at Inchon, at 0815 on 10 October, the I ROK Corps in its rapid advance up the east coast entered Wonsan. By the next day they had completed mopping up the town and were guarding the airfield on Kalma Peninsula. MacArthur then zigzagged back and forth with the idea of a new assault objective at Hungnam, 50 miles north. However, by the time the harbor characteristics and the availability of both landing craft and ships for unloading at two ports were reviewed, the original plan for Wonsan was retained with D-Day still set for 20 October.

The next surprise was a combination of circumstances. First was the discovery that the harbor and approaches to Wonsan were thor-



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A4452

Corsairs of VMF-312 at Wonsan Airfield are serviced for the continuing battle against Communist forces in northeast Korea. The squadron flew from Kimpo to Wonsan on 14 October, 12 days before landing craft brought elements of the 1st Marine Division ashore.

oughly sown with rather sophisticated Soviet mines of all kinds, from drifting contact types to magnetic ship-counting designs. It was determined that no entry for landing could possibly be made until the harbor was safely swept and the threat eliminated. The delays entailed in the sweeping combined with the early taking of Wonsan by the I ROK Corps to bring about an unusual reversal of the normal order in amphibious operations. When the assault elements of the division finally landed at Wonsan, they were welcomed ashore by the already well-established Marine aviation units.

Planning for 1st Marine Aircraft Wing operations in the northeast had kept up with the rapidly changing strategic situation. On 13 October, General Harris flew into Wonsan and on inspecting the condition of the field, decided to begin operations there immediately. With that decision, VMF-312 flew in from Kimpo on the 14th and wing transports flew in 210 personnel of the headquarters and VMF(N)-513 the same day. Two tank landing ships sailed from Kobe with equipment and personnel of MAG-12, and Far East Air Forces' Combat Cargo Command

began flying in aviation fuel. Some bombs and rockets to "get 'em started" were flown in on the planes of VMF(N)-513. On the 16th, VMFs -214 and -323, still on the *Sicily* and the *Badoeng Strait*, began operations at Wonsan, covering the minesweeping activities until 27 October.

With the delay of almost 10 days before the beach landings

could begin, the squadrons operating from Wonsan had to rely almost totally on air resupply for the period. The small amount of supplies that did arrive by ship arrived only by extreme effort and makeshift means. Edward S. John, the only second lieutenant in Marine Aircraft Group 12 at the time, was assigned the task of getting 55-gallon drums of aviation

One of the steady stream of Douglas R4D Skytrains that brought supplies to Marine fighter squadrons VMF-312 and VMF(N)-513 at Wonsan. The squadrons were totally dependent on airlift for all supplies during the 10 days it took to clear a lane through the Wonsan harbor minefields.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A130144





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A130420

Speed was of the essence for these Marine airmen in rearming their Corsair for repeated strikes against Chinese and North Korean forces. Ground crewmen in the foreground mix a batch of deadly napalm while other Marines hastily change a tire.

fuel from a tank landing ship, floating clear of the minefield, ashore. In accomplishing the feat, the drums were manhandled into World War II vintage landing craft, now under Japanese operation, using Korean laborers. When close to the beach, the drums had to be manually lifted over the side, as the ramp had been welded shut. Once in the surf the drums were waded ashore through the icy water.

The squadrons also were faced with added difficulties resulting from few bomb carts, trucks, and refuelers. Consequently, the fuel trucks had to be loaded by hand from 55-gallon drums which had been rolled more than a mile from the dumps, also by hand. This slowed operations somewhat, but judicious planning and steady effort maintained a useful sortie rate. Armed reconnaissance flights

were flown regularly which resulted in productive attacks on retreating North Korean troops. On the 24th, for example, a -312 flight surprised a column of about 800 North Koreans near Kojo, 39 miles south of Wonsan, and dispersed it with heavy losses.

With the change from an assault to an administrative landing at Wonsan, the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing was placed under the control of Far East Air Force, with delegation of that control to Fifth Air Force, north of the 38th Parallel. This required the daily operations schedule to be submitted to Fifth Air Force at Seoul by 1800 the previous day. Because of the distance involved and the poor communications that existed, it made it extremely difficult at best to get clearance back in time. This was resolved between General Harris and General Earl E. Partridge,

Commanding General, Fifth Air Force, with permission for the former to plan and execute missions for X Corps in northeast Korea without waiting for Air Force clearance. Direction of support for X Corps was exercised for the wing by MAG-12 from 15 October to 9 November. Night operations did not begin until late in the month because of delay in getting runway lights at Wonsan, but -513 flew day missions along with -312 from the beginning. After the administrative landing on the 27th, the two carrier squadrons operated in similar fashion to the way they functioned at Inchon.

Generally, Marine aircraft reported to specified Tactical Air Control Parties at times given in the Fifth Air Force daily order, in response to previous requests by ground units for air support. Close air support requests, which were of a more urgent nature, were usually handled by aircraft on runway alert or by flights orbiting a specific point on stand-by status.

As at Inchon, Major Vincent Gottschalk's VMO-6 was under the operational control of the 1st Marine Division. Two helicopters were flown from Kimpo to Wonsan on the 23d and the rest of the squadron came in by tank landing ship on the 27th. A flight echelon of helicopters remained at Kimpo until early November at the request of Fifth Air Force, for evacuation of casualties of the 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team in the Sukchon area.

After the landing of the initial elements of the division at Wonsan on the 26th, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, was ordered to Kojo, southeast of Wonsan. The battalion occupied positions in the vicinity with the mission of protecting the I ROK Corps supply dump there in preparation for its displacement to the north. It developed that a size-

able remnant of North Korean troops was in the area and a series of significant actions took place toward the end of the month. It soon became clear that the “remnant” was actually a seasoned unit of experienced troops, and that possibly a major counterattack was in the offing in the Kojo area. However, as it evolved, most of these actions were confined to night attacks by smaller units than were at first suspected. Aviation supplied the need for emergency evacuation of wounded by helicopter, and although there was a significant loss in killed and wounded, there was no need to reinforce the battalion from Wonsan. Ironically, the South Korean supply dump had been essentially moved out before the attacks occurred and when the North Koreans were finally beaten off and dispersed, the battalion was ordered back to Wonsan. The

Ordnance men operate a “belting” machine that inserted ammunition into a metal belt to be used in the 20mm cannons of the Corsair. The machine loaded the belts at a rate of 6,000 rounds per hour in comparison with the hand operation of 500 rounds per hour.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A130762



1stMarDiv Historical Diary Photo Supplement, Nov50

In 1st Marine Division operations around Wonsan, evacuation of the wounded was accomplished by jeep ambulance, and in the case of more seriously wounded, by helicopter. The Sikorsky HO3S and later Bell HTL helicopters attached to Marine Observation Squadron 6 were the cornerstones of the Korean War medical evacuation and rescue efforts.

final loss count was 23 killed, 47 wounded, and 4 missing. The battalion took 83 prisoners, with enemy casualties estimated at 250 killed, in addition to an undetermined number of wounded and a count of 165 enemy dead on the battlefield. The unit was back at Wonsan by 4 November.

With the major changes in strategy that accompanied the collapse of the North Koreans, and the rapid advances of Eighth Army and the two Republic of Korea Army corps to the north, MacArthur issued new directions, which affected X Corps and the Marines. One was an order for the 1st Marine Division to “advance rapidly in zone to the Korean northern border.” With the Eighth Army entering Pyongyang on 18 October, X Corps on the east coast was being left behind and the right flank of Eighth Army was becoming exposed. Hence the corps was

under pressure to move north at the earliest. With the exception of a significant engagement of the 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, in the Majon-ni area near Wonsan, similar to the action of the 1st Battalion at Kojo, most of the security requirements laid on the 1st Marines in and around Wonsan had been met by early November.

At Majon-ni, the various actions were supported by Marine aviation in the normal manner during daylight hours, but most of the attacks on the perimeter defenses occurred at night. Evacuations of wounded were by helicopter primarily, and several airdrops of supplies were included in the general air support. Marine losses in these actions included 20 killed and 45 wounded. Enemy casualties were estimated at 525 killed and 1,395 prisoners were taken. More than 4,000 Korean refugees were screened at the roadblocks

along the main supply route (MSR). The MSR itself was so precipitous, narrow, and difficult, the Marines lost 9 killed and 81 injured along one very tough stretch known as “ambush alley.”

While the 1st Marines were busy at Kojo and Majon-ni, the 5th and 7th Marines had taken up their new assignments to the north. This meant that the division stretched a total of 130-road-miles from the 1st Marines in the south to the 7th in the north. It would be a gross understatement to only say that this complicated the delivery of the usual air support by the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing to its brothers on the ground. With the arrival of additional Army elements of X Corps in the area, however, it became possible to shorten lines somewhat. The division’s command post was moved to Hungnam on 4 November, with the 5th and 7th Marines operating north. By 17 November, the 1st Marines were at Chigyong, 14 miles south of Hungnam, thus closing the stretch to less than 60 miles. This was a definite improvement, but Wonsan from the viewpoint of Marine aviation, was looking like a by-passed Japanese base from World War II. The concentration of the division north of Hungnam in its march to the Yalu River made the airfield at Yonpo increasingly attractive to the wing because it was in the center of the Hungnam-Hamhung area. This meant that response times for close air support would be considerably reduced for any actions that occurred to the north. Accordingly, on 6 November, MAG-33 was ordered to Yonpo from Japan, and by 10 November, was in operation there in time to receive VMF-212 from Wonsan. On the 15th, VMF-214 was ordered ashore from the *Sicily* and set up at Wonsan with MAG-12

supporting the squadron as best it could, bearing in mind that many pieces of vehicular equipment needed ashore are not required nor used on board carriers. Also, because of a shortage of shipping in the Far East, it took much longer to move essential shore-based equipment from where it was stored in Japan, in the case of both -214 and -212, to where it was needed in Korea. This meant that for a considerable period, bombs often had to be loaded by “muscle power,” aircraft refueled by small hand “wobble” pumps from 55-gallon drums, weighing 450 pounds, and many other operational and maintenance factors that revert to the hard way when the equipment just is not there. It was just another throwback to the sustaining principle of Marine aviation of doing the best with what you have got because the job must get done—and in this case, again, it was done.

Ground Situation

At the time of the Wonsan landing, the Marines had been

The outcome of the Chosin Reservoir campaign owed much to airdropped supplies by the wing’s twin-engine R4D transports. Assisting the Air Force’s Combat Cargo Command, Marine transports carried more than five million pounds of supplies to the front.

National Archives Photo (USMC) 127-N-A4841



124th Division, 42d Army, 13th Army Group, Fourth Field Army. Tokyo press releases dismissed these and other CCF contacts with the "volunteer" label and the plan remained in effect.

By the 27th, the 1st Marine Division was concentrated in the vicinity of the Chosin Reservoir, with the command post at Hagaru-ri, the 5th and 7th Marines at Yudam-ni, and the 1st Marines along the MSR with a battalion each at Chinhung-ni, Koto-ri, and Hagaru-ri. Colonel Homer L. Litzenberg, Jr., commanding the 7th Marines, while enroute from Hagaru-ri to Yudam-ni, had dropped off Company F at Toktong Pass to hold that critical point for any eventuality. On 25 November, Generals Smith and Almond conferred and the news was not good from the Eighth Army sector. The II ROK Corps had been overrun on Eighth Army's right and the Army itself was falling back before a wholesale CCF onslaught. In spite of these results, Almond ordered Smith to attack on the 27th as planned. At the time, 1st Marine Division intelligence had identified five more divisions from prisoner interrogations, and line-crossing agents had given firm indications of even more Chinese forces just to the immediate north.

On the morning of the 27th, the division began its attack from Yudam-ni on schedule but the lead regiment had only advanced about 2,000 yards when stiff resistance stopped it. On the night of the 27th, the CCF in great strength attacked all Marine positions from Yudam-ni to Koto-ri, including a division attack on Company F at Toktong Pass, and a strong assault of division-sized against the three-battalion task force of the 7th Infantry Division east of the reservoir. As the intelligence reports



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A130488
Marines who used the "daisy-cutter" in the South Pacific rig them again for use against the Chinese in Korea. Attaching the bombs to the racks of the Corsair required delicate adjustments, often difficult in the sub-zero Korean winter weather.

were gathered and analyzed, the results showed clearly that opposing the Marines and associated troops in the Chosin Reservoir area was the 9th Army Group, 3d Field Army. This comprised a total of four corps-sized armies, a force that added to the five divisions already identified by the 1st Marine Division, totaled, by some estimates, almost 100,000 seasoned Chinese infantry troops. With the disposition of the division north of Hungnam and Hamhung, in addition to attached units of Royal Marines and assorted Army units totaling only 20,500 in all, the balance of the two forces favored the Chinese by better than 5 to 1. The fact that much of this was known to Far East Command and X Corps on the 25th, with Eighth Army estimating 200,000 CCF in front of them, cannot go unmentioned in connection with General Almond's order to General Smith to attack as planned two days later, the 27th.

The situation had changed so radically and so quickly that on the 28th, General MacArthur called Generals Walker and Almond to Tokyo for a lengthy conference. The result of these deliberations was a change of strategy. The previous plan for North Korea was abandoned and both the Eighth Army and X Corps were to pull back to a more defensible line to the south. General Smith had already decided to start moving without any further delay and ordered the 5th and 7th Marines to move back to Hagaru-ri from Yudam-ni, the first leg of what would be a 68-mile fight through thousands of enemy troops.

Air Situation

The 1st Marine Aircraft Wing's command post and attached Headquarters and Service units, in addition to five fighter squadrons, had moved to Yonpo from Wonsan and Japan by late in November. The sixth squadron, VMF-323, was still launching its maximum efforts from the *Badoeng Strait*. Rounding out the wing's combat lineup was VMO-6 with its OYs and H03S helicopters, operating mainly from Yonpo, but also from wherever else required. This was a crowd for Yonpo, especially when it is remembered that much of the ordnance and maintenance equipment of the squadrons was not available. Also included in the serious shortage category were both transportation generally, and provision of any form of heated space for bare-handed engine and aircraft engineering maintenance.

Cold weather maintenance proved difficult. Touching the metal surface of an aircraft parked on the flight line with bare skin would cause the skin to stick to it. Aircraft engines had to be started throughout the night to keep them