A black and white photograph of U.S. Marines in a trench during the Korean War. In the foreground, a Marine in a helmet is operating a machine gun mounted on a tripod. Another Marine is visible behind him, also in a helmet. The trench is dug into the ground, and there are trees and foliage in the background. The scene is set in a wooded area, likely on a hillside.

# DRIVE NORTH

## U.S. Marines at the Punchbowl

*by Colonel Allan R. Millett  
U.S. Marine Corps Reserve, Retired*

Marines in the Korean War Commemorative Series





# DRIVE NORTH

## U.S. Marines at the Punchbowl

by Colonel Allan R. Millett, USMCR (Ret)

**T**he rumble of American field artillery through the morning mists in the valley of the Soyang River gave a sense of urgency to the change-of-command ceremony inside the headquarters tent of the 1st Marine Division. Four days of hard fighting in the withdrawal from the Hwachon Reservoir had brought the division safely to the river on 25 April 1951. The trek away from the Chinese 39th and 40th Armies had not yet, however, brought the division to the No Name Line, the final defensive position 15 miles south of the river designated by Lieutenant General James A. Van Fleet, commanding the U.S. Eighth Army. In a simple rite that included only the reading of the change-of-command orders and the passing of the division colors, Major General Gerald C. Thomas relieved Major General Oliver P. "O. P." Smith and took command of a division locked in a battle to stop the Chinese Fifth Offensive.

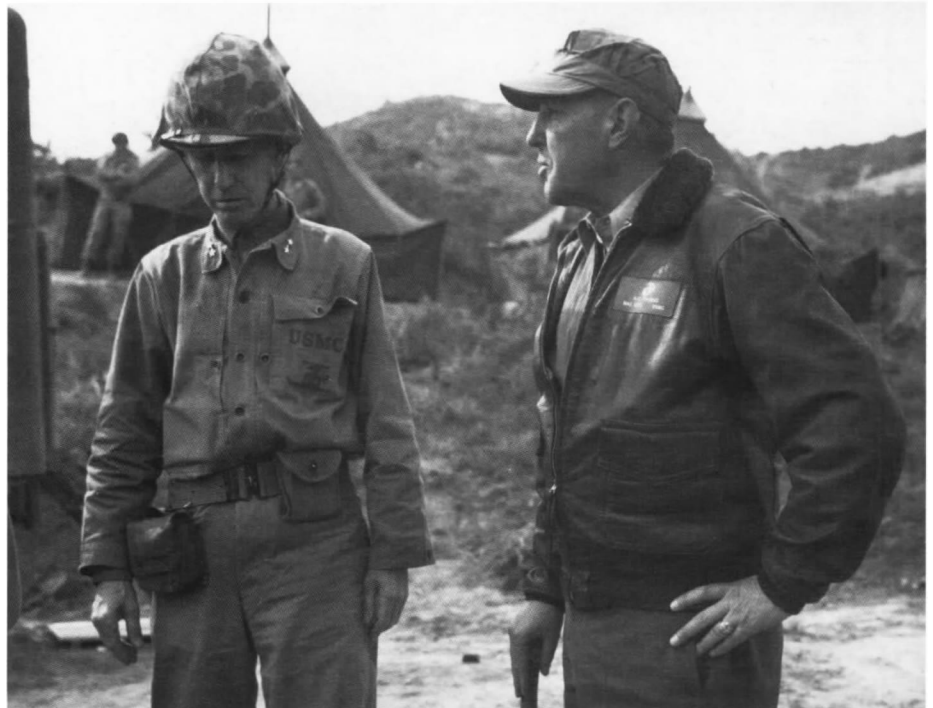
The ceremony dramatized the uncertainty of the Marines in the second year of the Korean War. Understandably, General Smith did

not want to turn over command in the middle of a battle. On the other hand, General Van Fleet wanted Thomas to take command of the division as soon as possible, something Thomas had not planned to do since his formal orders from the Commandant, General Clifton B. Cates, designated 1 May 1951 as turn-over day. Thomas had planned to spend the intervening week on a familiarization tour of Korea and the major elements of the Eighth Army. He had thought his call on Van Fleet the day before had been simply a courtesy visit, but instead he found himself caught in a delicate matter of command relations.

General Thomas arrived in Korea to face an entirely new war. The October 1950 dream of unifying Korea under the sponsorship of the United Nations (U.N.) had swirled away with the Chinese winter intervention. The war still hung in the balance as the United Nations Command attempted to drive the Communist invaders out of the Republic of Korea (ROK) for the second time in less than a year. The U.S. Eighth Army and its Korean counterpart, the *Hanguk Gun* (South Korean Armed Forces) had rallied in January and February 1951, under the forceful leadership of Lieutenant General Matthew B. Ridgway, USA. United Nations

*MajGen Gerald C. Thomas, right, meets with MajGen Oliver P. Smith prior to the spartan change-of-command ceremony witnessed by a handful of participants drawn from the 1st Marine Division's staff.*

Gen Oliver P. Smith Collection, Marine Corps Research Center

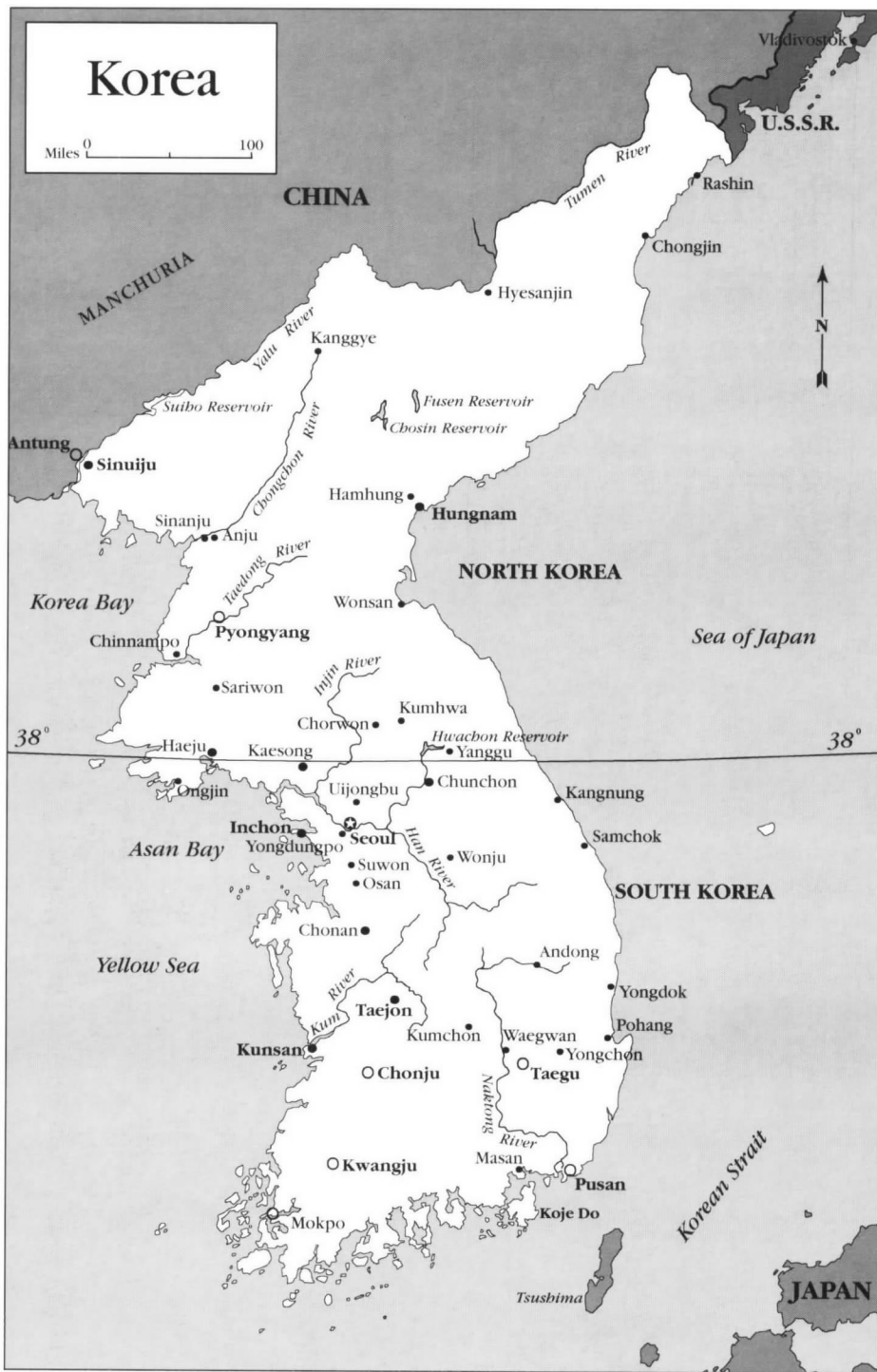


**ON THE COVER:** *Two Marine machine gunners "keep the gun hot" in their pursuit of fleeing Communist troops.*

National Archives Photo (USMC) 127-N-A8866

**AT LEFT:** *Marines quickly demolish enemy bunkers with grenades and planted charges before moving north.*

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A8504



Command had then driven back the Chinese Communist Forces (CCF) and the North Korean People's Army (NKPA). The allies had advanced well north of the 38th Parallel in central and eastern Korea. Goaded by Mao Zedong, General Peng Dehuai ordered his joint expeditionary force of 693,000 Chinese and North Korean soldiers to mount one more grand

offensive. Eleven Chinese armies and two North Korean corps (40 divisions) would smash south just west of Hwachon Reservoir in the sectors held by the U.S. I and IX Corps. At a minimum the Communist forces, about half of Peng's total army, would drive United Nations forces below the 38th Parallel. The maximum objective would be to threaten the Han River

valley and the corridors to Seoul while at the same time recapturing the territory south of the Soyang River, which opened an alternative corridor south to Hongchon.

When General Thomas called on General Van Fleet on 24 April, the Eighth Army commander, a combative 59-year-old Floridian with a World War II record of successful command from regiment to corps in Europe, felt confident that his forces had blunted the four-day-old Communist offensive. However, he had an organizational problem, which was that the 1st Marine Division should be shifted back to X Corps and redeployed to the No Name Line under the command of Lieutenant General Edward M. Almond, USA, the division's corps commander throughout 1950. The relationship between O. P. Smith and Almond, however, had become so venomous that Ridgway assigned the Marine division to IX Corps in January 1951 and promised Smith that he would not have to cope with Almond, whose style and substance of command angered Smith and his staff. Van Fleet had honored Ridgway's commitment, but the operational situation dictated that the Almond-Smith feud could not take precedence.

Van Fleet explained the plan to shift the 1st Marine Division back to X Corps to Thomas without going into the Almond-Smith problem. Van Fleet did not give Thomas a direct order to proceed immediately to the 1st Marine Division headquarters near Chunchon. Thomas believed, however, that Van Fleet had sound reasons to want a change of command now, so he caught a light plane furnished by the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing and flew to the primitive airstrip that served the division. Escorted by the new assistant division commander, Brigadier



General Lewis B. “Chesty” Puller, Thomas went directly to Smith’s van and told him of Van Fleet’s request and future plans. Smith refused to relinquish command. Without mounting an argument, Thomas left the van and went to the operations center to confer with Colonel Edward W. Snedeker,

the chief of staff, and Colonel Alpha L. Bowser, the G-3, both of whom sympathized with Thomas but thought Smith should remain in command. Thomas thought the division was well positioned to refuse the open left flank of X Corps, but he also felt the tension in the command post.

Thomas decided that the issue of command could not be postponed—and now at least Smith knew he faced the prospect of again serving under Almond. Thomas returned to Smith’s van within the hour and stated simply: “O. P., the table of organization calls for only one major general in

---

## Major General Gerald C. Thomas

**G**erald Carthrae Thomas spent a lifetime dealing with challenging command relationships and operational problems inside and outside the Marine Corps. Born on 29 October 1894 on a farm near Slater, a western Missouri railroad town, Thomas grew up as a working boy in a working family. He was also a good student and versatile high school athlete. Living in Bloomington, Illinois, he attended Illinois Wesleyan University (1915-1917) before enlisting in the Marine Corps in May 1917 to fight the Germans. Thomas, age 22, mustered in at five feet, nine inches and 160 pounds, strong of wind and limb from athletics and labor. Dark hair and heavy eyebrows set off his piercing blue eyes and strong jaw. He would need every bit of his emotional balance and physical stamina—lifelong traits—for the Marine Corps placed him in the Germans’ sights for most of 1918. As a sergeant and lieutenant in the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, Thomas learned about war at Belleau Wood, Soissons, and the Meuse-Argonne. When the Silver Star and Purple Heart medals were authorized in 1932, Captain Thomas, professional officer of Marines, pinned on one award for gallantry and another for being gassed.

In the interwar years, Thomas had already fought against Haitian guerrillas, served a second tour in Haiti as a staff officer, and commanded a Marine detachment on a Navy gunboat in the Caribbean and Central America. He also lost one wife to disease, married again (Lottie Capers Johnson of Charleston, South Carolina) and started a family of two sons and two daughters. The Marine Corps recognized his potential value in wartime by sending him to five different Army schools (including the prestigious U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth) and assigning him twice as an instructor in Marine Corps schools.

Between 1940 and 1950, Thomas proved that the Marine Corps had not wasted a minute or a dollar on his professional education. In a decade that saw him advance in rank from major to major general, Thomas prepared the Fleet Marine Force for war as an instructor at Quantico, military observer abroad, and a staff officer in the 1st Marine Division as the division conducted its last pre-Pearl Harbor amphibious exercises. When the



National Archives Photo (USMC) 127-N-A132593

division deployed to the South Pacific, Lieutenant Colonel Thomas went to war as Major General Alexander A. Vandegrift’s operations officer (G-3), an assignment that made him one of the architects of victory on Guadalcanal. A trusted intimate of Vandegrift’s,

Thomas served as the general's chief of staff during the final months of the Guadalcanal campaign and then played the same role in the I Marine Amphibious Corps' landing on Bougainville. He returned to Washington with Vandegrift when the general became Commandant in 1944. As a brigadier general, his second "spot" promotion in a row, Thomas fought the battles of demobilization and postwar defense reorganization, 1944-1947, as the Director of Plans and Policies on the Headquarters staff and played a critical role in winning legislative protection for the Fleet Marine Force in the National Security Act, 1947. He then spent two years as commanding general, Fleet Marine Force, Western Pacific, a brigade-sized force that garrisoned the Shantung peninsula and the city of Tsingtao until the Chinese Communist military victories in North China in 1948 made the American enclave irrelevant. Thomas successfully withdrew his force without incident in February 1949 and returned to educational and developmental billets at Marine Corps Base, Quantico.

Thomas' rich and exciting career had not, however, been without professional risks and cost. His aggressive personality, the force with which he defended his convictions, and his unwillingness to tolerate leadership lapses that endangered Marines had made him anathema to some of his peers, two of whom stopped his first promotion to major general. Others thought him too demanding a colleague. In 1951 only two opinions counted, those of Commandant Clifton B. Cates and Lieutenant General Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr., Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, and Cates' likely successor as Commandant. Although neither Cates nor Shepherd were part of Vandegrift's "Guadalcanal gang," they knew Thomas well and rec-

ognized his special qualifications to go to Korea. In addition to his recent service as Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, Western Pacific, Thomas had done a pre-war China tour in the Peiping legation guard. And despite his dogged defense of the Marine Corps in the Battle of the Potomac, 1945-1947, he got along well with the U.S. Army. As head of research and development, Thomas also understood the 1st Division's importance as test bed for future techniques like vertical envelopment.

After his successful command of the 1st Marine Division in Korea, April 1951-February 1952, Thomas returned to Headquarters Marine Corps as a lieutenant general and Assistant Commandant/Chief of Staff for General Shepherd. For the next two years, Thomas focused on reorganizing the Headquarters staff on functional general staff lines, on improving Marine Corps relations and representation within the Department of the Navy, and planning the postwar Fleet Marine Force of three divisions and three aircraft wings, a force more than twice as large as the Fleet Marine Force in June 1950.

For his "twilight cruise" Thomas became Commandant, Marine Corps Schools, Quantico (1954-1955), his favorite post and role as officer-instructor. Upon retirement he remained in government service as the first executive director, Net Evaluation Committee, National Security Council staff from 1956 to 1958. He then entered private business in real estate and insurance in the Washington, D.C. area. He regularly attended 1st Marine Division Association functions and events related to Marine Corps history; his four sons and sons-in-laws all served as Marines, two retiring as colonels. General Thomas died on 7 April 1984 at the age of 89.

---

a division. Either you turn over to me, or I'm going to leave." Smith did not respond, and Thomas again left the van. After several minutes of more tension, Smith emerged from his van and told Thomas that the change-of-command ceremony would be held at 0800 the next morning. The 1st Marine Division had a new commanding general as it entered a new era in its service in Korea.

### The New Division

Although the last veterans of the campaigns of 1950 did not leave Korea until the autumn of 1951, the 1st Marine Division had started a process of transformation in April

1951 that did not depend solely on Communist bullets. Headquarters Marine Corps now sent out replacement drafts not just to fill holes in the ranks from casualties, but also to allow the surviving veterans of longest service to return to new assignments in the United States or for release from active duty. The 9th Replacement Draft reached Korea in early June, bringing 2,608 Marine officers and enlisted men to the division and 55 officers and 334 men to the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing. New naval personnel for both Marine organizations totaled six officers and 66 sailors, mostly medical personnel. The incoming Marines had a departing counterpart, the 3d

Rotation Draft, composed of 62 Marine officers, 1,196 enlisted men, and 73 sailors; the draft included 103 convalescing wounded. The 10th Replacement Draft arrived late in June, adding 74 more officers and 1,946 men to the division and 12 officers and 335 men to the aircraft wing. One naval officer and 107 sailors joined the division and wing.

Nevertheless, Thomas thought that the manpower planners had cut their estimates too close and requested that subsequent drafts be increased by a 1,000 officers and men. Despite the personnel demands of forming the new 3d Marine Brigade at Camp Pendleton, Fleet Marine Force,



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A156022

*The command team of the 1st Marine Division stands outside a briefing tent at the division headquarters. Pictured from left are BGen William J. Whaling, assistant division commander, MajGen Gerald C. Thomas, division commander, and Col Victor H. Krulak, division chief of staff.*

Pacific, honored Thomas' request. The 11th Replacement Draft (14 July 1951) brought 3,436 Marines and 230 naval personnel to the division and 344 Marines to the aircraft wing, accompanied by 22 sailors. Nevertheless, the division remained short of majors, company grade artillery officers, and officers and enlisted men in almost every technical specialization, especially communications and logistics.

General Thomas had no complaint about the quality of the Marines he had inherited from O. P. Smith or those sent to him by Lieutenant General Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr., Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific. The senior officers and company commanders were proven World War II veterans, and the lieutenants were an elite of Naval Academy graduates, NROTC graduates, and officer candidate school products that more than matched the com-

pany grade officers of World War II. The enlisted Marines were a solid mix of career noncommissioned officers and eager enlistees. Thomas recognized that the division he now commanded was "in splendid shape" and prepared to fight and win in terrain and weather "never designed for polite warfare." He wrote retired Major General Merritt A. Edson that the 1st Marine Division was "the best damn division that ever wore an American uniform."

Thomas went ahead with plans, coordinated with Shepherd, to form his own team as the division staff and to appoint new regimental commanders. Thomas arranged for Brigadier General William J. Whaling, an old friend who had been Thomas' alter ego on Guadalcanal, to become the assistant division commander on 20 May. Whaling became his eyes and ears on tactical issues with his superb knowledge of men,

weapons, and fieldcraft. Colonel Snedeker remained chief of staff until he gave way on 23 May to Colonel Francis M. McAlister, whose command of the 1st Marines was cut short by wounds on the 18th. Since he had come to Korea in 1950 as the division G-4, McAlister rotated home, to be replaced temporarily by Colonel Richard G. Weede, who had taken Colonel Bowser's place as G-3 on 8 May. Shepherd and Thomas had someone else in mind for the division chief of staff's post, Colonel Victor H. Krulak, the G-3 of Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, and a trusted colleague of both generals through World War II and the postwar years. Krulak became division chief of staff on 29 June with a special charge to begin experiments with the Marine Corps' one operational helicopter squadron.

The rest of the division staff brought enough character and expertise to their jobs to please Thomas. The G-1, Colonel Wesley M. Platt, had spent World War II as a Japanese prisoner of war; his leadership among the prisoners had won him the admiration of his peers and great influence on the staff. Thomas' two G-2s, Lieutenant Colonel Joseph P. Sayers and James H. Tinsley, did a workmanlike job. Like Weede, Colonel Bruce T. Hemphill, and Lieutenant Colonel Gordon D. Gayle served as Thomas' G-3s under the close and critical scrutiny of Colonels Krulak and Weede, who also served as division chief of staff. Colonels Frank P. Hager and Custis Burton, Jr., performed the thankless task of G-4 until they rotated to the command of the 5th and 11th Marines, respectively, although Burton later returned as chief of staff in February 1952 to replace Weede.

The commanders of the infantry regiments were all tested veterans







## Clarence Jackson Davis: Every Marine

In the soft spring of his senior year (June 1950) at Hillsboro High School, Nashville, Tennessee, Clarence Jackson Davis, called “Jack” by his family and friends, discovered several reasons to join the Marine Corps Reserve. Going to war was not one of them. Jack Davis planned instead to go to Vanderbilt University, where his older brother Vince was already a sophomore and a keen midshipman in the Naval ROTC unit. Jack admired Vince, but he did not fancy himself a naval aviator like his older brother. On the other hand, the local Marine Corps Reserve infantry company had some openings, and he and some high school football and baseball teammates liked the idea—advanced by some sweet-talking Marine sergeants—of keeping their baseball team together under the sponsorship of the Marine Corps. Marine training seemed little more than another athletic challenge; the recruiters mentioned that weekly drill often included a basketball game. The new recruits had no active duty requirement and the two weeks summer training sounded like a Boy Scout camp with guns. Besides, the recruiters insisted, participating in reserve training made a young man draft-proof from the U.S. Army.

Jack also saw his enlistment as a potential way to help pay for his college education and, if all went well, become a Marine officer. More farsighted than many of his friends and counseled continuously by Vince, Jack had already talked with the Marine major on the Vanderbilt NROTC staff, who advised him that enlisted service would strengthen his chances for selection for the next summer’s Platoon Leaders Class. Serving as an enlisted officer-candidate in the Marine Corps Reserve seemed a less-demanding way of helping pay for his education than attempting to win a football grant-in-aid playing for the hapless Commodores. The Davis brothers calculated that their military commitments would allow them to attend school without facing a demanding working schedule, a financial relief they could stretch by living at home to study and avoiding the temptations of campus social life.

Jack enlisted in the Marine Corps Reserve at the age of 17 in March 1950. If not quite a youthful lark, his decision did not seem very momentous, but a combination of good planning, reasonable sense, and anticipated adventure. He would try the life of a Marine, and he would be paid to camp out and play sports for the Marine Corps. His life after high school, however, “did not work out as planned.” One night in June 1950, after graduation, Jack watched a newsreel at a local movie theater and learned about some distant war in Korea. His first reaction: “I was thrilled I was not there.”

Lieutenant General Clifton B. Cates, Commandant of the Marine Corps and a fellow Tennessean, made sure that Jack Davis learned the true meaning of being a vol-



unteer Marine from the Volunteer State. After the Fourth of July the ground units of the Marine Corps Reserve received a warning order that they would soon be mobilized, and on 20 July the Commandant made it official: Marine reservists in ground units would be called to active duty “for the duration.” Certainly most (if not all) of them would go to Korea as part of the 1st Marine Division. After the confusion of in-processing, medical examinations, and additional issues of 782 gear, the Nashville Marines of Company C, 14th Battalion, Marine Corps Reserve, marched off to war from their reserve center at Shelby Park down Broad Street until they reached the 11th Street railroad siding off old Union Depot. Curious spectators watched the young men march off, their parade dominated by the blaring of high school bands at the front and rear of the column. With M-1s and dressed in green utilities the Marines did not look like their predecessors of the 11th Tennessee Volunteer Infantry, Confederate States of America, but the spirit of those young Nashvillians, equally perplexed and determined in 1861, stiffened the backs of their 1950 successors.

Whatever his expectations, Private Clarence Jackson Davis, U.S. Marine Corps Reserve, did not go off to war untrained—as did his Confederate ancestors and goodly part of the U.S. Eighth Army in 1950. At Camp Pendleton, his “station of initial assignment,” Jack’s Company C received the triage of personnel mobilization: true veterans of active duty were culled out for immediate assignment to the Fleet Marine Force, probably directly to the 1st Marine Division; Marine reservists whose drills and summer camp more or less approximated boot camp went on to eight more weeks of pre-deployment field training and physical conditioning; and the untrained true “boots” like Jack Davis went south to the Marine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego, to begin their life as real Marines.

The temporary mission of the Marine Corps Recruit

Depot was not turning young men into Marines but into day laborers and stevedores. All hands spent much of every day mobilizing the depot for the expected waves of new recruits; the reservists set up bunks, hauled mattresses out of storage, and carried footlockers into the reopened barracks. Every night for two weeks the reservists went to the North Island docks to load ammunition and mount-out boxes for the 1st Marine Division. Not until the division cleared the harbor for Japan did the reservists start their formal boot camp schedule, which now seemed like welcome relief from the role of slave laborers. Jack Davis found boot camp no special challenge.

The follow-on field training, eight weeks and mandatory for every Marine regardless of assignment, proved more and less fun. Jack enjoyed the long days on the ranges of Camp Elliott. He qualified with ease with the M-1 and fired the entire range of individual and crew-served weapons found in a Marine infantry battalion. Jack liked them all except the M-1 carbine, which riflemen did not carry anyway. The last phase of the training focused on cold weather, mountain training at Pickel Meadow, which was neither meadow-like nor cold. Temperatures that December reached the 70s, and the

Marines trudged around in the mud and slush in their layers of cold-weather clothing issue, all of them perilously close to heat exhaustion and dehydration. Apparently the Marine Corps had found a way to train the replacements for Korea's winters and summers at the same time.

In January 1951, Jack Davis and his comrades of the 6th Replacement Draft boarded the Army transport *Randolph* for the trip to Korea. The *Randolph* had come directly from Pusan where it had disembarked a part of the 1st Marine Division, recently evacuated from Hungnam. When Jack and his messmates reached their troop compartment, they found the canvas bunks decorated with messages from the survivors of the Chosin Reservoir campaign. Jack did not find the words of wisdom very comforting. A few were clever and humorous, but most of the collected battlefield folk wisdom struck Jack as sad, depressing, bewildered, stunned, and even suicidal. As the messages from the veterans attested, the war had almost been lost, had almost been won, and then almost lost again. As General Douglas MacArthur had just reported to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Jack Davis and his comrades now faced the Chinese army and an entirely new war.

---

could usually find the right combination of leadership and technical skill to give the separate battalions a strong commander. Among the commanders General Thomas inherited in these battalions were Marines whose accomplishments had made them legends: Lieutenant Colonel John H. Partridge of the 1st Engineers, who had opened the route out of the Chosin Reservoir; Major Lloyd O. Williams, the master marksman, who commanded the 1st Ordnance Battalion; and Lieutenant Colonel Henry J. "Jim" Crowe of the 1st Shore Party Battalion, a heroic battalion commander at Tarawa and Saipan as well as another team shooter.

As the commander of a great division, whose management he shared with an able staff, General Thomas could focus on his relations with Generals Van Fleet and Almond. Although Van Fleet took a practical, unpretentious approach to commanding Eighth Army, General Almond had become not one whit more subdued by the

twin blows of surrendering the independent status of X Corps and the abrupt removal of his patron, General of the Army Douglas MacArthur. Almond retained the imperiousness and elegant field life style that characterized many Army generals of his generation and, especially, his two models, MacArthur and General Mark W. Clark, his army commander in World War II. Surrounded by staff officers from central casting—albeit very talented—Almond favored high-fashion field uniforms, opulent vans and messes, and imperial gestures worthy of Napoleon himself, including the haphazard awarding of medals. Almond's airy disregard for time-space factors and enemy capabilities, as well as his habit of ignoring the chain-of-command, had driven General Smith into tight-lipped rebellion. Thomas had dealt with some difficult Marine generals, but Almond would be a challenge.

Thomas first made sure that no one would mistake him for the

Almond model of a modern major general. He truly preferred the look of the Old Corps of World War II, not a U.S. Army that had remade itself in the image of its flamboyant armor and airborne generals like Walton H. Walker and Ridgway. Thomas wore a uniform that was strictly issue from his battered utility cap and standard helmet to his canvas leggings and worn, brown field shoes. Instead of the "generals" version of the Colt .45-caliber automatic worn the Army-way with a fancy leather belt, he carried an issue pistol in a black shoulder holster. None of his regular field wear—jacket, sweaters, shirts, and trousers—would be mistaken for tailors' work. His only personal affectation (a very useful one at that) was his old Haitian *cocomacaque* walking stick, whose only local counterpart was carried by General Shepherd. On special occasions General Thomas and his regimental commanders might sport white scarves and the division staff red scarves, but the idea



was Van Fleet's, who thought the scarves would show the troops that senior officers were not allergic to frontline visits.

Still a part of IX Corps—one wonders now about the urgency in the change of command—the 1st Marine Division disengaged from the Chinese 39th and 40th Armies and fell back unmolested 15 miles to the No Name Line, a belt of prepared positions dug by Korean laborers and Army engineers. The 1st Marines, reinforced by a battalion of the 7th Marines, protected the bridges and passes while the rest of the division withdrew in good order over the Pukhan and Soyang Rivers, both in flood from rain and melting snow. By 29 April the division had put the rivers at its back and filed into the No Name Line positions with the 5th Marines, the 1st Regiment of the Korean Marine Corps (KMC), and the 7th Marines on line from west to east. The 1st Marines went into division reserve. Colonel Bowser thought that the retrograde movement—which he and Thomas did

not think necessary—proved that the division had lost nothing of its 1950 ability to march and fight superior numbers of Chinese troops without prohibitive losses. Meanwhile General Van Fleet met with his corps commanders on 30 April to discuss Eighth Army's next move: an active defense of the No Name Line and maximum readiness to meet another Chinese-North Korean offensive, predicted for mid-May by Van Fleet's intelligence staff. In the reorganization of the front, the 1st Marine Division would rejoin X Corps, effective 1 May.

General Thomas first had to fight off General Almond before he could focus on killing Chinese. The two generals met every day for three days (1-3 May), and Thomas emerged victorious in establishing new ground rules for the Marines' dealing with X Corps. Thomas had already told his staff that it would take a hard-line with "suggestions" from any corps staff member; one of his assistant operations officers tested the guidance

by telling his Army counterparts from Almond's headquarters that he could "go to hell" for giving orders in Almond's name.

Thomas took a disgruntled Almond head on. He could be charming in his own way—he pointed out his own Virginian and Confederate roots to Virginia Military Institute "Old Grad" Almond—but he insisted that Almond stop bypassing the chain-of-command or allowing his staff to run roughshod over the proper channels in the 1st Marine Division. Almond insisted he was an active corps commander. (Meddlesome was the word the Marines chose.) Thomas told him that he was an active division commander and that he intended to make as many visits to regiments and battalions as Almond made. Thomas added that he would "execute any order proper for a soldier to receive." Almond pressed Thomas to go on, but Thomas now remained silent as if expecting a further elaboration of policy. Almond said he would make many visits. "Is that all right with you?" Almond continued. More silence. Almond went on: "But I can assure you that I will never issue an order affecting one of your units except through you." Now Thomas responded: "On that basis . . . you are always welcome." The two generals remained true to their word.

Thomas tested the era of good feeling with X Corps almost immediately and to positive effect. Van Fleet had the notion that each division should establish a battalion-sized outpost from which it could patrol northwards to make contact with the Chinese. For the 1st Marine Division the best place to establish such a base—which Thomas and Bowser thought was a miserable idea—was south of Chunchon but north of the critical

*The 1st Marines regimental headquarters occupies a tent-camp along the road to Hongchon, just south of the No Name Line. United Nations Command air superiority allowed such administrative arrangements.*

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A8728



Morae Kagae Pass, the only route of escape to the No Name Line. The position would be outside the artillery fan of the 11th Marines, and close air support alone (now complicated by Air Force scheduling practices) would be no substitute. Thomas argued with Van Fleet and Almond that he would perform the mission, but that he should dictate the size of the force and its rules of engagement—and disengagement. When Thomas put his “patrol base” in place on 5-7 May, he sent the entire 7th Marines (artillery and tank reinforced) north toward Chunchon, and he added the 1st KMC Regiment to Nickerson’s task force. In addition, he had the 5th Marines put a screening company in front of each of its frontline battalions, but kept the companies well within artillery support.

Thomas continued to press X Corps for more artillery since Van Fleet’s intelligence staff insisted that the next Chinese offensive might focus on the 1st Marine Division. Thomas’ own ground and aerial patrols found ample evidence of Chinese troop movements between the Pukhan River and the No Name Line. The commanding general had also heard Van Fleet insist that no Eighth Army unit, a company or larger, should be isolated and cut-off; Van Fleet told his generals that night withdrawals and counterattacks should be abandoned as operational options. He also insisted that every division artillery groupment (the 11th Marines for Thomas) should use its daily allowance of shells (the “Van Fleet unit of fire” or five times the normal allotment of shells) to fire upon suspected enemy concentrations and transportation routes. Thomas persuaded Almond that the 1st Marine Division could not meet Van Fleet’s expectations without some Army



National Archives Photo (USMC) 127-N-A8898

*A Marine patrol secures a hill and moves forward. Its mission was to maintain contact with the enemy, warn of an impending attack, and delay its progress as much as possible.*

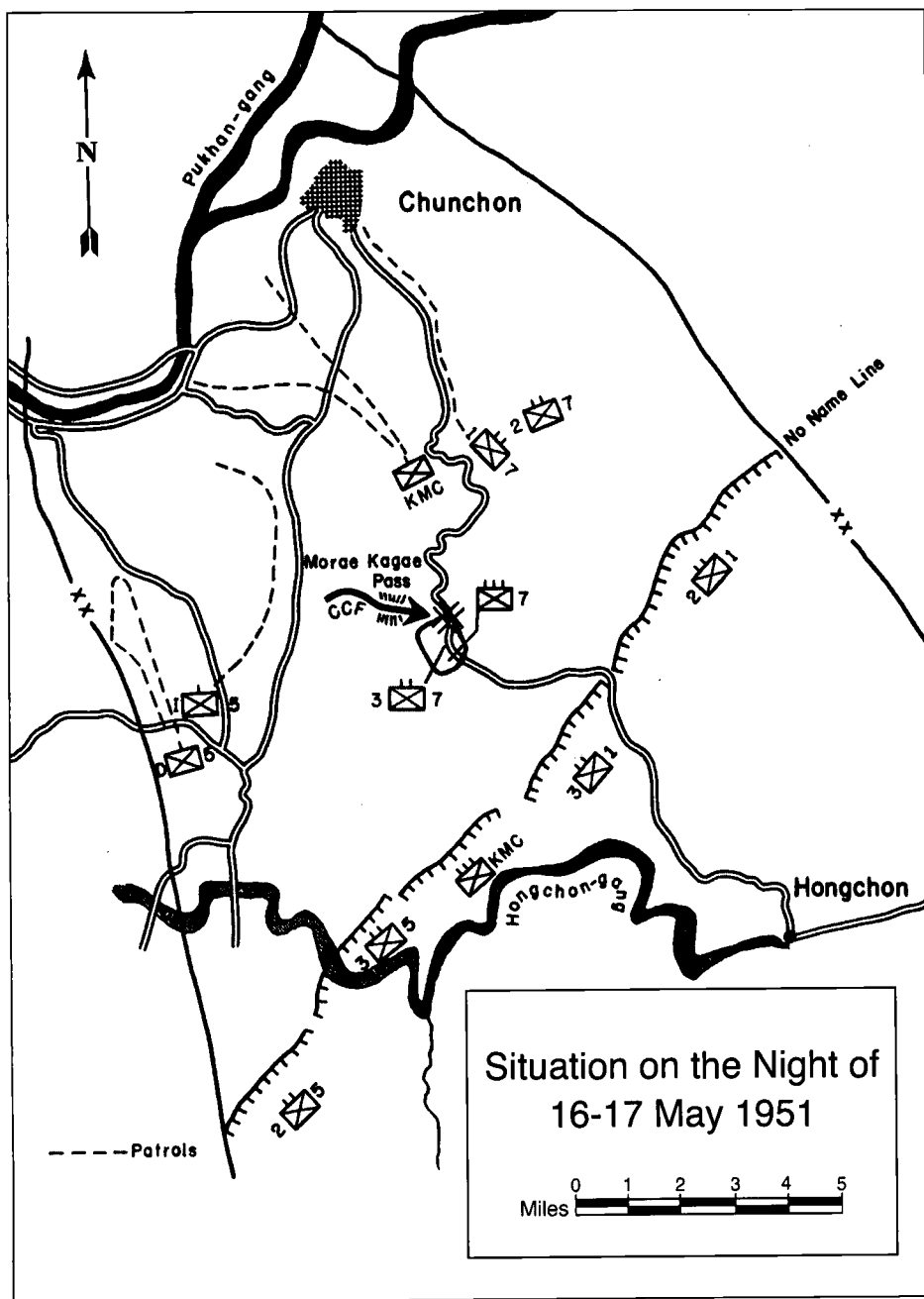
help, and Almond committed two X Corps general support artillery battalions to reinforce the fires of the 11th Marines. Thomas also negotiated a shortening of his frontage since he had to put two battalions of the 1st Marines into the line to replace the 7th Marines, which left only one infantry battalion as division reserve. Even though he had come to conclude that the Chinese were massing to the east instead of to his front, Thomas had no intention of allowing any part of the 7th Marines to be cut off between the Morae Kagae Pass and the No Name Line. He approved a Nickerson-Davis plan to garrison the pass with a reinforced battalion (less one rifle company) and simply announced the change to Almond, who did not object to the fait accompli. Thomas also planned to extract the 7th Marines from its advanced position as soon as he thought he could justify such an action to Almond. He anticipated that trouble would develop along the

boundary of the 1st Marines and the U.S. 2d Infantry Division, not to his front. The 7th Marines would be his new division reserve, ready to attack to the northeast. The plan proved to be prescient.

### Offensive and Counteroffensive

Changing their operational style of nighttime infiltration attacks, characterized by surprise and the limited use of artillery, the Chinese *Ninth* and *Third Army Groups*, augmented by the North Korean *II* and *V Corps*, opened the Fifth Offensive (Second Phase). On the morning of 16 May 1951, the offensive began with a Soviet-style preparatory artillery bombardment. Frustrated in his April offensive, Peng Dehuai decided that the limited road network and sharp, rugged mountains of eastern Korea offered a better area of operations for a renewed offensive. Van Fleet and his corps commanders would find it more difficult to shift reinforcements against the shoulders





of any breakthrough, and the steep mountains made it difficult to mass United Nations artillery fire. The broken, forested terrain would provide welcome cover and concealment from United Nations Command air strikes. The weight of the Chinese offensive (27 divisions with three artillery divisions in support) fell on (from west to east) the U.S. 2d Infantry Division, the 5th ROK Division, and the 7th ROK Division of X Corps with additional attacks upon the neighboring 9th ROK Division of the

Republic's III Corps. The Chinese did not ignore the western-most division of X Corps, the 1st Marine Division, which would be pinned in its part of the No Name Line by attacks from the Chinese 60th Army. The minimal operational goal was to destroy one or more U.N. divisions; a major victory would be the fragmentation of either X Corps or the ROK III Corps and a return to a campaign of movement that would dislodge the Eighth Army from the Taebaek Mountains to the Han River valley.

Eventually described by X Corps as the battle of the Soyang River, 16-21 May 1951, the Chinese offensive overran various parts of the frontline positions and the patrol bases of the hard-luck 2d Infantry Division and the three ROK divisions to its right. Despite some dogged defensive action by American and South Korean soldiers, the Chinese advanced 30 miles, forcing the three ROK divisions to the south and threatening to roll-up the right flank of the 2d Division, which lost the better part of the 38th Infantry and its attached Dutch battalion in slowing the Chinese attack. General Almond decided he needed to insure that the western side of the Chinese salient was secure first; he requested reinforcements from Van Fleet, who sent the 187th Airborne Infantry Regiment and U.S. 3d Infantry Division to blocking positions behind X Corps. In the meantime, Almond wanted the 2d Infantry Division to refuse its right flank. Such a redeployment required the 1st Marine Division to extend its sector of the No Name Line to the east and to do so while in contact with the enemy.

On the first day of the Chinese offensive, General Thomas visited Almond's command post at Hoengsong and saw the crisis build in X Corps' eastern sectors. Thomas and Almond discussed what situations the 1st Marine Division might face, but Thomas would make no commitments until he was sure he could withdraw the 7th Marines (Reinforced) from the ill-conceived "patrol base" north of the No Name Line. Closer to the anticipated Chinese attack, Colonel Nickerson reinforced the outpost at Morae Kagae Pass, bringing the defenders to battalion strength and including the regimental headquarters and a tank platoon. Having just joined the 7th Marines—his

regiment in World War II—Second Lieutenant Earl F. Roth wondered who had placed the regiment so far from the rest of the division. He reached the Morae Kagae Pass and the 7th Marines rear defenses only after a long and lonely jeep ride across an empty countryside, but he felt eyes watching him from every hill. When he later saw the piles of Chinese bodies at the pass, he remembered similar scenes from Peleliu. On the evening of 16 May, a Chinese regiment attacked the pass in force and lost 112 dead and 82 captured before breaking off the action. Nickerson's force lost two tanks, seven dead, and 19 wounded. The attack gave Thomas plenty of reason to pull back Nickerson's entire regiment, ordered that night with Almond's approval. Colonel Frank T.

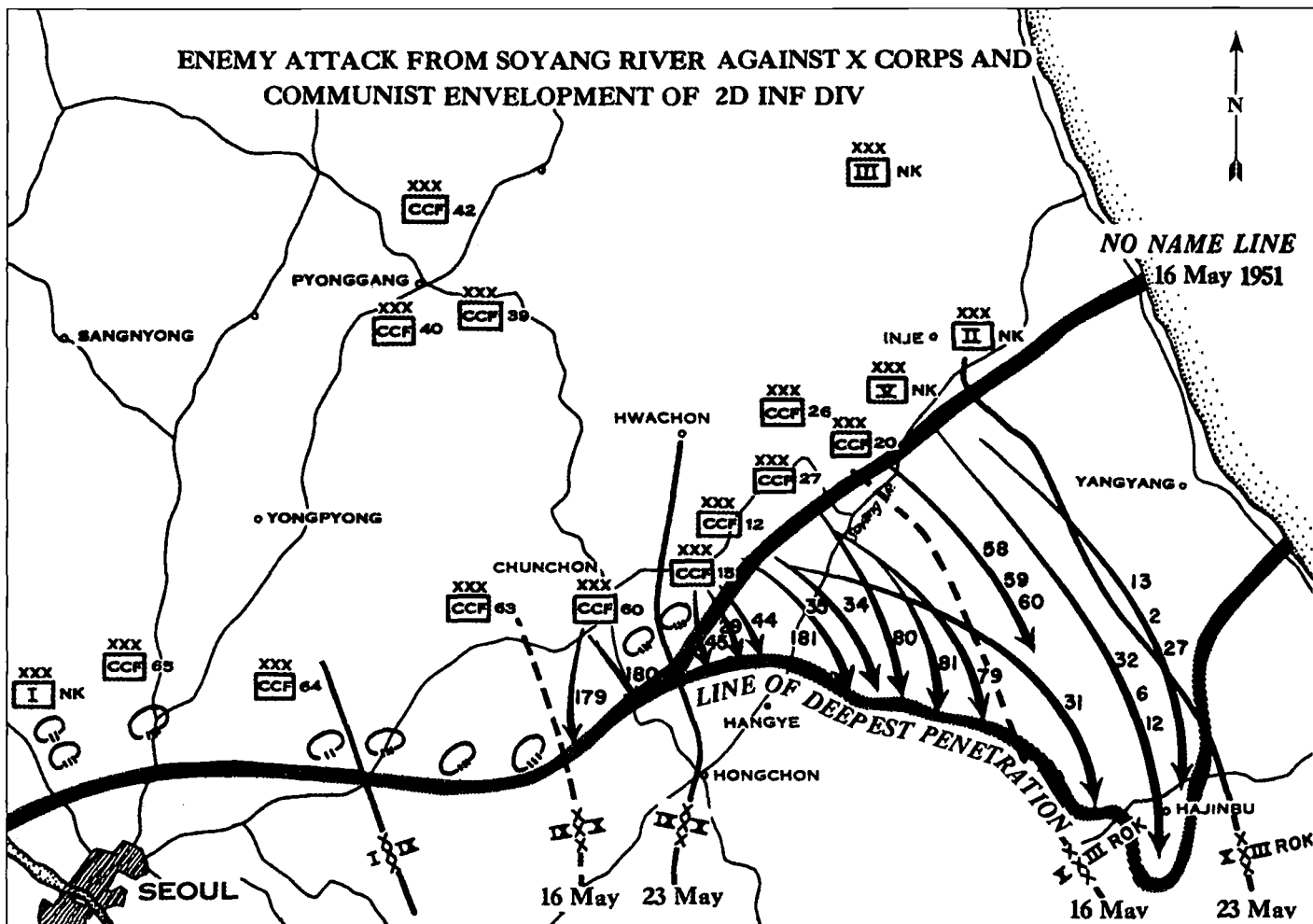


Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A155692  
*Marines of the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, gather the bodies of the Chinese 179th Division, which attacked the regiment's patrol base at Morae Kagae Pass on the night of 16 May. As part of the Chinese Fifth Offensive (Second Phase), the attack did not pin the 1st Marine Division to the No Name Line, which allowed its redeployment to the east to aid the U.S. 2d Infantry Division.*

Mildren, X Corps' operations officer, correctly assumed that the Chinese wanted no part of the 1st Marine Division: "The Marines [are]

just wrapped up in their usual ball." Mildren's assessment did not accurately picture the 1st Marine Division's skillful redeployment to

Gen Edward M. Almond Collection, U.S. Army Military History Institute





release the U.S. 9th Infantry Regiment for a new mission, saving the rest of its parent division.

After artillery and air strikes insured that the Chinese 60th Army marched east to the sound of somebody else's guns, Thomas ordered the 1st Marines to shift right and take the 9th Infantry's positions while the 7th Marines marched back to the No Name Line and took over the 1st Marines sector. In the meantime, two battalions of the 5th Marines moved eastwards behind the No Name Line to refuse the division right flank north of the crucial road junction of Hongchon. The 7th Marines and the 1st KMC Regiment slipped to the left to take over part of the 5th Marines' former sector. General Thomas reported at 1730 on 18 May to Almond that the realignment had been accomplished, but that he also wanted more corps artillery ready to fire defensive fires along his thinly-manned front. He requested and received more aerial reconnaissance from the Cessna light patrol aircraft (L-19 "Bird Dogs") assigned to X Corps. Thomas had already improved his defensive posture by placing the 1st Marines in positions almost four miles south of the original No Name Line. The only contact occurred on 20 May when elements of the Chinese 44th Division marched unawares into the defenses of the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, and left behind almost 170 dead and prisoners when the Marines shattered the lead regiment with their battalion weapons, artillery, and air strikes. The 1st Marine Division awaited more orders. It did not expect Almond to remain on the defensive since X Corps now had fresh troops and the two Chinese army groups had placed themselves inside a vulnerable salient.

Although he had won the



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A8875

*MajGen Gerald C. Thomas checks the frontline situation map with the 5th Marines' commanding officer, Col Richard W. Hayward, center, and the regiment's operations officer, Maj Robert E. Baldwin.*

respect of Almond and his staff in his first month of division command, General Thomas had no intention of becoming a compliant subordinate commander when he thought Army generals paid too little attention to tactical realities. Thomas and Almond conferred twice on 19 May and again on 20 May at the 1st Marine Division command post. The issue was a counteroffensive order from Van Fleet to I and IX Corps, a movement that began on 20 May for the 7th Infantry Division, the IX Corps element on Thomas' left flank. Almond wanted the 1st KMC Regiment to advance beyond the No Name Line to conform to IX Corps' advance, but Thomas "expressed reluctance" to send a regiment on an axis of advance that took it away from the rest of the division and opened a gap in the division's defensive alignment. Thomas won a concession from Almond immediately: he could make his own arrangements to secure X Corps' left flank and coordinate the movement directly with IX Corps.

As Peng Dehuai acknowledged, the collapse of the Fifth Offensive (Second Phase) gave United Nations Command an unprecedented opportunity to mount a counteroffensive of potential strategic consequences. Even though his army group commanders protested his withdrawal orders, Peng called off the offensive on the afternoon of 21 May and issued orders that the eastern armies should withdraw during the night of 23-24 May to a defensive line that would run from the Imjin River to Hwachon to Kansong, roughly the line occupied by United Nations Command when the Fifth Offensive began in April. Five Chinese armies and three North Korean corps would defend the line.

Prodded by General Ridgway, who flew to Korea to inject some of his special bellicosity into a flagging Eighth Army, Van Fleet had stolen half a march on his Chinese counterpart by ordering I and IX Corps to start a drive to the Topeka Line, a phase line on the ground about halfway to the contemplated



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A8867

*A .30-caliber machine gun team and a Marine with a Browning Automatic Rifle occupy recently abandoned enemy foxholes, using them for cover while pursuing Chinese and North Korean forces.*

Chinese defenses. Van Fleet and the corps commanders of I and IX Corps, however, could not create much urgency in their divisions. Neither Ridgway nor Van Fleet thought I and IX Corps had seized

the moment. They were thus pleasantly surprised when Almond, who seized moments whether they were there or not, proposed that he could shift to the offensive as soon as noon on 23

*Elements of the 2d and 3d Battalions, 5th Marines, bit the dirt after taking heavy enemy mortar and machine gun fire from Chinese forces occupying Hill 1051. Air and artillery*

*forced the enemy to retire northward and the regiment secured the commanding high ground.*

National Archives Photo (USA) 111-SC368657





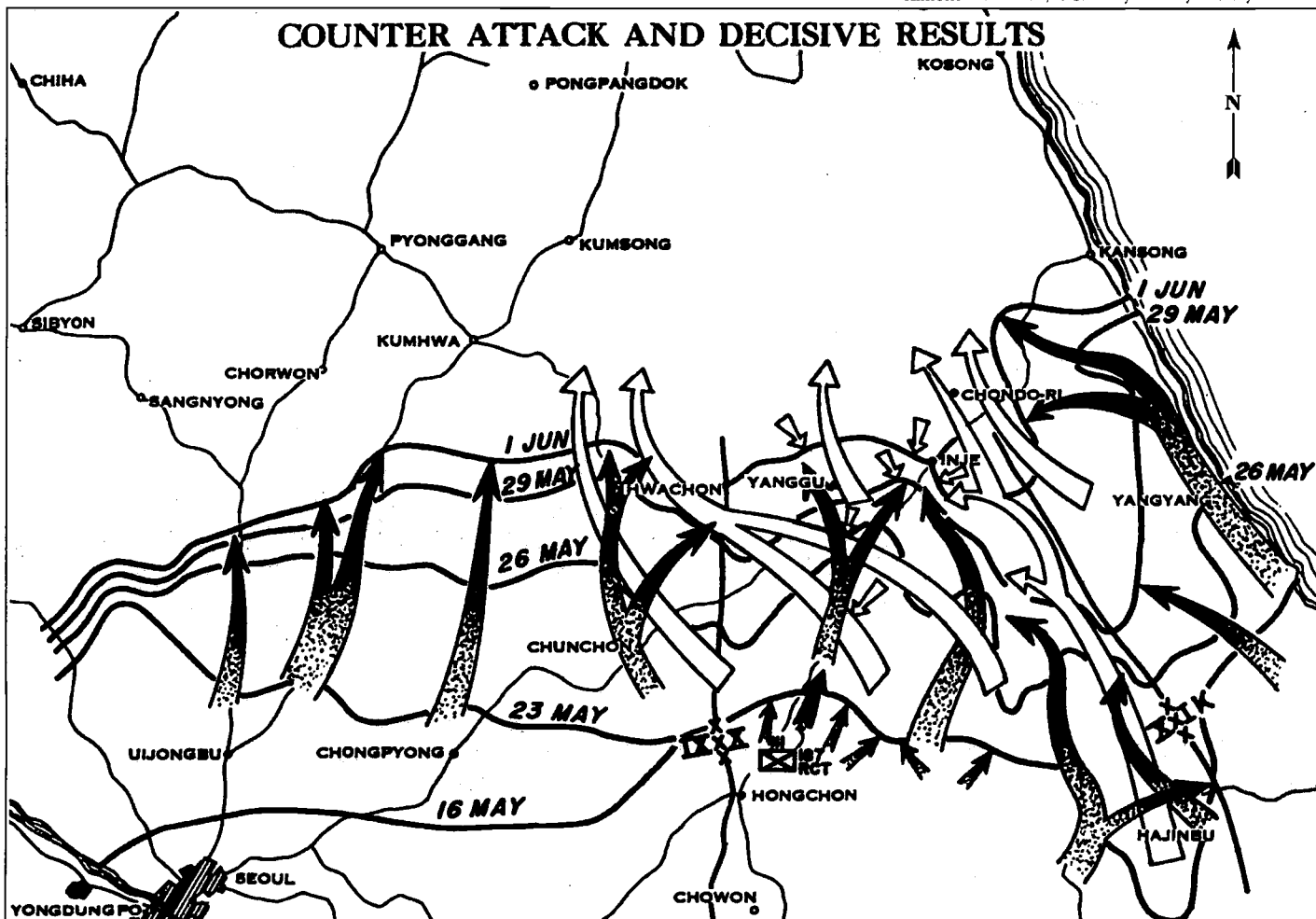
axis of advance provided General Thomas and his staff with new challenges. A shift of corps boundaries as far east as a line Hongchon-Hwachon Reservoir helped some, but not much. As he himself later admitted, Almond had once again promised too much, too soon in the way of decisive action. For once he had not underestimated the enemy; the Chinese army groups in his zone of action were indeed wounded, but not as seriously as Eighth Army estimated. (United Nations Command estimated total Chinese casualties for the Fifth Offensive at 180,000, but the Chinese put their own losses at half this total.) The difficulty was the time and effort necessary to get the offensive moving with task forces drawn from the 2d Infantry Division, the 3d Infantry Division,

the 187th Airborne, and the divisional and corps tank battalions. The result was that the attacks at the tip of the salient jumped off on time (mid-23 May), but the big drive across the base of the salient did not begin until 24 May and the serious, organized advance up Route 24 did not begin until the next day. In the meantime the Chinese, attacked 12 hours before they began their own withdrawal, fought back sluggishly as they moved up their withdrawal schedule, a euphemism for—in some cases—a Chinese “bug out.”

The result of the gelatinous attack by Major General Clark L. Ruffner's 2d Division and its attached task forces was that the 1st Marine Division advance, also dutifully begun on 23 May, had to conform to the Army units on its

right. The Marine advance of 24-31 May developed into a two-axis attack with the 1st Marines and the 1st KMC Regiment moving through the hills south of Soyang, crossing the river on 28 May, and reaching the heights above the Hwachon Reservoir on 31 May. The 5th and 7th Marines started the march north in a column of regiments, but the 7th Marines pulled ahead while the 5th Marines took the commanding heights of Kari-san (Hill 1051). The 7th Marines then turned northeast away from Route 24 to take the shortest route to the town of Yanggu, just east of the eastern end of the Hwachon Reservoir. The 7th Marines assaulted and captured the Yanggu heights, but watched the Chinese flee through the open zone of the tardy U.S. 2d Infantry Division. The

Gen Edward M. Almond Collection, U.S. Army Military History Institute





National Archives Photo (USN) 80-G-429689

*After securing Kari-san (Hill 1051), Marines search two Chinese prisoners of war for weapons and documents.*

5th Marines shifted right to the hills east of the road to Yanggu and drew abreast of the 7th Marines on 29-30 May. The next day all of Thomas' four regiments occupied their portion of Line Topeka.

For the rifle companies at the head of each pursuing battalion, the war did not look much like the reassuring blue arrows on an acetate-covered 1:25,000 map. The last two weeks of May 1951 proved to be hot and very dry during the day, but cold and wet at night as unusual spring rains kept the hills slick and the valleys a slough. Water to drink, however, proved harder to find than water for discomfort. Few Marines were willing to chance the ground water or local streams, but potable water seemed to take second place to ammunition in the columns of Korean bearers. In an era when "water discipline" made "exces-

*Hugging the crest of a ridgeline, the 7th Marines prepare to "pour hot lead" into enemy positions as a prelude to a general assault by other Marine units.*

National Archives Photo (USMC) 127-N-A8888





National Archives Photo (USMC) 127-N-A155279

*Marines of Battery L, 4th Battalion, 11th Marines, prepare their 155mm howitzer for a fire mission in support of Marine units around Yanggu. Observed, adjusted artillery fire provided the Marines with essential support against North Korean defensive positions.*

sive” drinking a sin in the Marine Corps, dehydration stalked the struggling columns of laden troops. The columns not only fought groups of Chinese, but marched through the Eighth Army’s dying fields of February and May, passing the bodies of soldiers from the 2d Infantry Division.

Despite the profligate use of artillery and air strikes, the Marine rifle companies found their share of close combat in the last week of May. Moving along a steep hillside only by hanging from the trunks of shattered trees, Second Lieutenant Earl Roth’s platoon saw enemy mortar rounds fly by them and explode in the gully below. Roth suppressed a strong urge to reach out and catch a mortar round as it passed by, a vestige of his football playing days at the University of Maryland. Although the firefights seldom involved even a whole company, they were a world of war for the engaged Marines. One platoon of Company C, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, stormed a Chinese ambush position only to

have the defenders charge right back at them in the most intimate of meeting engagements, a brawl won by the Marines with grenades, clubbed rifles, bayonets, and fists. Urged on by the company’s Beowulf, Second Lieutenant Paul N. “Pete” McCloskey, the Marines left few survivors, but their post-fury victory celebration was cut short by a deluge of 120mm mortar rounds pre-registered on top of the position. The company lost its commanding officer and other Marines in the swift reversal of fortune.

The six days of offensive action in the last week of May 1951 demonstrated to friend and foe alike that the 1st Marine Division remained a fearsome killing machine. Using artillery and tank fire, supplemented with battalion mortars and machine guns, the infantry regiments methodically took their objectives with minimal casualties and no operational crises. The Marines continued to run into scattered battalion-sized remnants of Chinese divisions,

none willing to hold any position against the deluge of fire poured upon them. On 28 May, however, the Marines started to discover organized, company-sized defensive positions manned by North Koreans and ringed with mines. By 31 May, the day of the division’s heaviest casualties for the week (126 killed and wounded), the Chinese had disappeared from the battlefield. During the week the division intelligence staff estimated that the division had inflicted 10,000 casualties; what it knew for certain was that the regiments had counted 1,870 enemy bodies and taken 593 prisoners. The 1st Marine Division’s losses for the entire month of May were 83 killed in action or died of wounds and 731 wounded. The “exchange ratio” against an enemy still considered dangerous and willing to fight was about as good as could be expected.

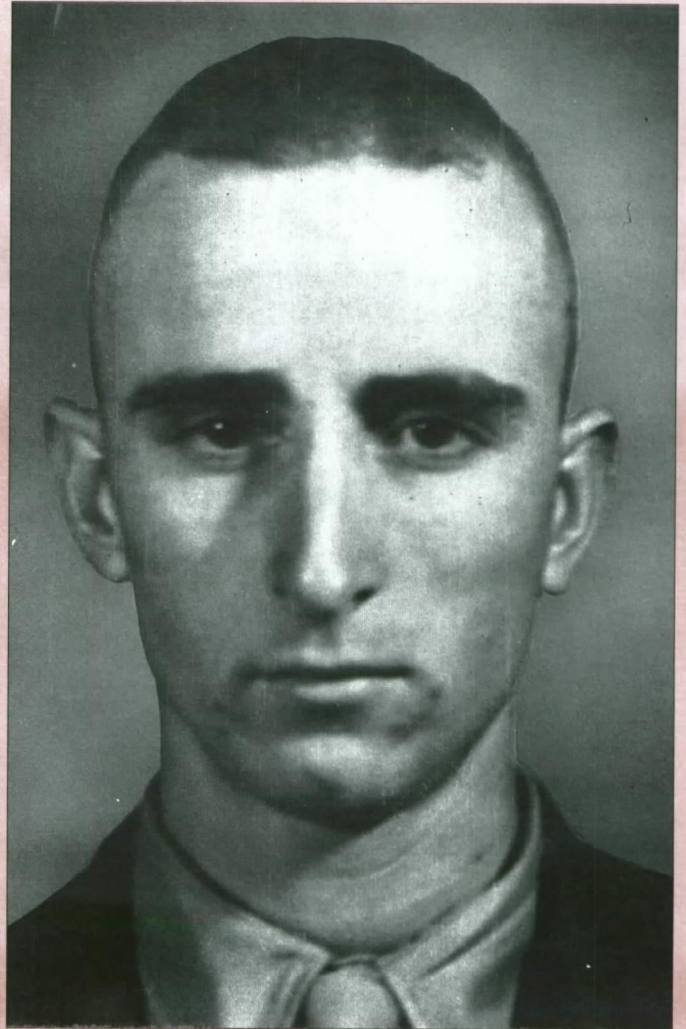
The week of divisional attack brought its share of surprises. The enemy provided some of them. The Chinese, aided by the slow advance of the 2d Infantry Division, refused to wait for their entrappers and poured out of the salient after the first attacks of 23 May. Chinese soldiers from five different divisions of the *Third Army Group* crossed the path of the Marines on their way to rally points at Yanggu and Hwachon; the chaotic pattern of the Chinese withdrawal meant that enemy bands might appear at any time from the east and south, which lead Almond and Thomas to confer daily on flank security issues. When the Marines met the better-armed and trained infantry of the North Korean *12th Division*, they also came under fire from Soviet-made artillery and mortars. The Chinese withdrawal, however, gave Marine artillery a field day; between 10 May and 7 June the 1st



## Private First Class Whitt L. Moreland

**B**orn in 1930 in Waco, Texas, he enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1948, following graduation from Junction City High School. After serving out his active duty, he reverted to Reserve status. In November 1950, he was recalled to active duty and sent to Korea. While serving as an intelligence scout while attached to Company C, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, he was killed at Kwagchi-dong on 29 May 1951. The citation of his posthumous Medal of Honor award reads, in part:

Voluntarily accompanying a rifle platoon in a daring assault against a strongly defended enemy hill position, Private First Class Moreland delivered accurate rifle fire on the hostile emplacement and thereby aided materially in seizing the objective. After the position had been secured, he unhesitatingly led a party forward to neutralize an enemy bunker which he had observed some 400 meters beyond and, moving boldly through a fire swept area, almost reached the hostile emplacement when the enemy launched a volley of hand grenades on his group. Quick to act despite the personal danger involved, he kicked several of the grenades off the ridgeline where they exploded harmlessly and, while attempting to kick away another, slipped and fell near the deadly missile. Aware that the sputtering grenade would explode before he could regain his feet and dispose of it, he shouted a warning to his comrades, covered the missile with his body and absorbed the full blast of the explosion, but in saving his companions from possible injury or death, was mortally wounded.—Captain John C. Chapin, USMCR (Ret)



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A46966

Marine Division artillery fired 13,157 tons of shells, second only to the 2d Infantry Division (15,307 tons). The corps artillery group kept pace, especially since its fires supported the South Korean divisions. All X Corps divisions surrendered their trucks to keep X Corps guns supplied with shells. By the end of May ammunition shortages had become an operational concern. The artillery expenditures and the stiffening Communist defenses suggested that the “happy time” of X Corps exploitation operations had come to an end.

General Thomas had every reason to be proud of his division, for

Generals Ridgway, Van Fleet, and Almond all visited his command post and praised the division’s performance. General Shepherd and his senior staff visited the division on 28-29 May, and Shepherd added his congratulations not only for the operational successes, but also for the good relations with the Army. And Almond went out of his way to tell the other generals how much he valued Thomas’ wise counsel. (Thomas was not so sure that Almond listened to anyone, but at least the corps commander now observed the chain-of-command.) Finding another way to celebrate a victory, the commander

of the 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, sent one of his lieutenants out on a desperate mission: find ice somewhere around Yanggu to cool the battalion’s beer ration. Second Lieutenant Harold Arutunian’s patrol returned with ice—stolen from the body bags of an Army graves registration unit. For at least one week the 1st Marine Division had fought by its book, and it suffered negligible casualties by pounding every objective with preparatory air strikes and artillery concentrations. For once Almond did not exaggerate when, on 31 May, he characterized the Marines as “fatigued, but spirits high.”

## North to the Kansas Line

Perched in their most recent fox-holes above the Hwachon Reservoir and the blackened ruins of Yanggu—so flattened and incinerated that only the charred bank vault gave the town a skyline—the forward infantry battalions of the 1st Marine Division could see only more sharp hills to the north, rising ever higher into the smoky dusk of the last day of May. They did not know that conferences elsewhere were already deciding their fate in the month ahead.

The Chinese Fifth Offensive and its crushing defeat had opened the way for a second “entirely new war,” but not one that made any of the belligerents very happy. The Communist coalition shared a common problem with United Nations Command: was there any operational option that offered advantage worthy of the risks of strategic escalation? What if the Soviet air forces, for example, mounted attacks on the American airbases in Korea? What if the Soviet navy mounted submarine or maritime aviation attacks upon the U.N. naval forces that roamed the east and west seas with impunity?

Relatively certain that Joseph Stalin would not authorize any attacks that might bring American retaliation on Soviet bases in the Far East, Mao Zedong sought some employment of the Chinese Communist Forces that would eventually destroy the will of the United Nations and the Republic of Korea to continue the war. On 27 May 1951, Mao Zedong opened discussions on strategy with his principal commanders in Korea. Within a week Mao conferred with eight senior officers of the CCF, especially First Deputy Commander Deng Hua and Chief of Staff Xie Fang. Mao told his field commanders that the CCF would con-



National Archives Photo (USA) 111-SC382822  
*The Joint Chiefs of Staff directed the Commander in Chief, U.N. Command, Gen Matthew B. Ridgway, USA, to continue the offensive but only by advancing to the Wyoming-Kansas Line, a phase line in the mountains north of the 38th Parallel. The underlying objective of these operations was designed to support a negotiated end to hostilities.*

duct *niupitang* attritional warfare of position until United Nations Command casualties reached unbearable proportions.

Mao's use of the word *niupitang* could not have been more apt since *niupitang* was a delicious but very sticky candy from his native Hunan Province, an irresistible sweet that took a very long time to eat and usually made a mess. The *niupitang* strategy would work well with a policy of *biantan bianda* or simultaneous negotiating and fighting. Within two months Mao replaced three of the four army group commanders, retaining only Yang Dezhi, a modern commander and a protégé of Deng and Xie, and promoting him to second deputy commander and de facto director of operations for the Communist field forces. Peng Dehuai remained the titular com-

mander of the CCF, but Deng Hua, Xie Fang, and Yang Dezhi directed the new strategy, “On the Protracted War in Korea,” announced in July 1951.

The other Communist co-belligerents reacted to *niupitang* in much different ways, but neither the Soviets nor the North Koreans had much leverage on Mao Zedong. If they wanted the war to continue—and they did—they depended upon the Chinese army to bear the brunt of the fighting. Now that the war had not produced a great Communist victory, Stalin (beset with political problems at home) saw no reason to go beyond his commitment of Soviet air defense forces to “MiG Alley” along the Korean-Manchurian border and to rearm the Chinese army. The Soviets, in fact, saw truce negotiations as a way to increase their influence in the United Nations as well as to buy time to rebuild and rearm the Chinese forces. The North Koreans—represented by the pestiferous Kim Il Sung—wanted only more war and no talks, unless a truce brought an end to American air strikes. Kim and his inner circle agreed, however, that the 38th Parallel should be restored as an international border and that all foreign troops (including the Chinese) should leave Korea—after the South Korean army had been fatally weakened and the North Korean People's Army restored to fighting trim and much-enlarged. Kim ordered his generals to fight to the death for every rocky foot of North Korean soil.

The process of political-strategic reassessment, which had begun with the Chinese intervention in November 1950, blossomed in May 1951 like the cherry-blossoms in Washington, D.C. and Korean coastal resort town of Chinhae. Hints of peace negotiations sprout-



## Close Air Support Controversy

By the spring of 1951, the question of close air support for United Nations Command ground forces had become a serious inter-service controversy that pitted the Marine Corps and some of the senior commanders of the Eighth Army against the United States Air Force and General Matthew B. Ridgway, the United Nations and American theater commander. To some degree the controversy involved the employment of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing and several lesser and often false issues, e.g. jets versus propeller aircraft, but the heart of the problem was simply that the Air Force did not want to perform the mission. It regarded close air support as a wasteful and dangerous misuse of offensive tactical air power. Marine Corps aviation and Navy carrier-based aviation regarded close air support as an essential contribution to the ground campaign. The victim in all this inter-service wrangling was the Eighth Army and the 1st Marine Division.

From the Air Force perspective, the close air support mission belonged at the bottom of its offensive air missions, although the leaders of the Army Air Forces as early as 1943 insisted that air power was the equal of ground combat power in the conduct of war. The same senior officers donned new uniforms in 1947, but did not drop their old ideas about close air support, despite the relatively effective use of ground-directed air strikes against the German army in 1944-1945. The Air Force position was rooted in negative experiences: the bombing and strafing of friendly troops; the extraordinary losses to ground fire in making front-line, low-level bombing runs; and the conviction that Army ground commanders knew nothing of fighter-bomber capabilities and would scream for close air support when artillery was a more rapid and appropriate response to their indirect fire support requirements. The guidance in effect for Air Force-Army close air support operations in 1950 was the "Joint Training Directive for Air-Ground Operations," an agreement only between Tactical Air Command and Army Field Forces, not the Service headquarters.

In theory and application in Korea in 1950 the doctrine of the "Joint Training Directive," which the Air Force embraced as authoritative, made close air support difficult for a ground command to obtain. Basically, the Air-Ground Operations System (AGOS) required that a ground commander request air support prior to an operation and be very specific about his needs. Requests had to be processed through an Army operations officer (G-3 Air) from regiment through field army and reviewed by an Air Force officer at each echelon of command (the air liaison officer) until the request reached the Joint Operations Center (JOC), run by an Air Force general, which would allocate the available air strikes. The request system insured that close air sup-

port strikes were not likely to be tactically relevant, but the air direction system the Air Force preferred also added to the problem. The definition of close air support was that air strikes should be coordinated with the fire and maneuver of the ground forces through the positive direction by a forward air controller (FAC) who was fully knowledgeable about the ground combat situation. There was no fundamental disagreement that a Tactical Air Control Party (TACP) with reliable air-ground communications (vehicle- or ground-mounted) should be available so the FAC could direct air strikes by sight, just like an artillery forward observer. The Air Force, however, did not want to use its own personnel for such missions, and it did not trust the Army to provide a competent FAC. The Air Force might provide an Air Liaison Party down to the regimental level to do air strike planning, but it was not going to send Air Force officers (presumably pilots) out to the front to direct air strikes. In some fairness, the Fifth Air Force did provide such Tactical Air Control Parties to the Eighth Army in 1950, and they were shot to pieces—radio-jeps and people alike.

The Fifth Air Force in 1950 created an air strike direction system that depended on airborne air controllers, basically the World War II system. During the course of the fighting in 1950 the Fifth Air Force and Eighth Army committed people and equipment to form the 6147th Tactical Control Squadron, later expanded to wing status. The "Mosquitoes," as the forward air controllers (airborne) came to be known, did yeoman work throughout the war, directing air strikes from their two-seat, propeller-driven North American AT-6 "Texan" aircraft, a World War II pilot trainer. The "Mosquitoes" lacked nothing in courage and skill, but they were still hostages to the JOC system. Either the air strikes had to be pre-planned or they had to be requested as a matter of dire

National Archives Photo (USMC) 127-N-A131261







Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A130146

emergency or diverted from other missions.

The Navy-Marine Corps system, developed for amphibious operations in World War II, offered a different approach. The Air Force tried to brand the system as driven by amphibious operations, which it was to some degree, but the system had proved itself in land campaigns on Saipan, Guam, Peleliu, Iwo Jima, the Philippines, and Okinawa. The Navy and the Marine Corps brought the same system to Korea, and it worked. It worked so well that Army generals, especially Major General Edward M. Almond, embraced it without reservation. His successor as commander of X Corps, Major General Clovis E. Byers, also became a convert, and it cost him his command. Other Army commanders at the division level envied the system and wondered why they could not receive adequate support, but they were too intimidated by Lieutenant General Matthew B. Ridgway to push the issue.

The Air Force consistently misrepresented the essence of the Navy-Marine Corps system. The naval services never challenged the important of air superiority or interdiction operations. The naval services simply argued—and placed in their own doctrine—that if close air support missions were to be flown at all, they should be rapid, responsive, appropriate, and effective. The 1st Marine Aircraft Wing might be best trained to perform such missions, but it was the system that counted, not

the uniforms of the pilots or the type of planes they flew. The senior Marine ground commander did not command aviation units, as the Air Force charged. Either X Corps or 1st Marine Division did not command the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing.

The Navy-Marine Corps system accommodated planned requests, but its strength was its tactical flexibility. Each infantry battalion in the 1st Marine Division had a Tactical Air Control Party of two elements. One group served as the Air Liaison Party, part of the battalion operations staff. The other group was the Forward Air Control Party, an officer and communicators who could process requests for air support and direct air strikes from the ground, usually well forward with an infantry company. In practical terms, this system meant that each Marine infantry battalion had two Marine officers (naval aviators) as part of the battalion staff to insure that air strikes hit the enemy and did so soon enough to affect the tactical situation. The system worked, and the Marine Corps saw no reason to abandon it.

As X Corps commander, General Almond liked the Navy-Marine Corps system, which he saw at close quarters during the Inchon-Seoul campaign and again during the withdrawal to the Hungnam enclave. In fact, he ordered his Army divisions to form their own TACPs or he arranged for the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing to send

TACPs to Army units (American and Korean) within his corps. The ability of the TACPs to direct strikes naturally drew most of the sorties flown in December 1950 by the Marine squadrons and the naval aviators flying from the decks of Task Force 77.

The operational conditions and requirements of 1950 made it appear that the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing had come to Korea to be General Almond's corps aviation component. In fact, X Corps functioned much like a modern Marine air-ground task force, even if Almond had no direct authority over any of his supporting tactical aviation squadrons. Fifth Air Force, however, thought this ad hoc arrangement should not continue. In early 1951, General Ridgway and Lieutenant General George E. Stratemeyer, Commander General, Far East Air Forces, insured that General Douglas MacArthur placed X Corps in the Eighth Army and the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing under the operational control of the Fifth Air Force and the Joint Operations Center. The Marines could perform their close air support magic for all of Eighth Army, not just X Corps. Ridgway, however, demanded that Fifth Air Force study the whole close air support question and find ways to make the JOC system more responsive to unplanned ground requests for air strikes.

While Fifth Air Force and Eighth Army both conducted reviews of the Air-Ground Operations System, the war went on. The 1st Marine Division returned to the fray in February 1951 without its usual customary air support, either in quality or quantity. Marine fighter-bomber squadrons (F4U Corsairs or F9F Panthers) flew missions for all of Eighth Army with results that depended entirely upon the ability of either the airborne "Mosquitoes" or ground spotters (if any) to identify the targets and communicate with the aircraft. In the meantime, Task Force 77 sailed north to attack Communist railroads and highways ("the bridges of Toko-ri"), and Air Force fighter-bombers of varying nationalities (predominately American or Australian) showed up to conduct missions for the 1st Marine Division with mixed results. Major General Oliver P. Smith asked Ridgway to use his influence with Fifth Air Force to give Smith operational control of just one Corsair squadron. Ridgway refused to raise the issue and breach the "single man-

agement" doctrine. "Smith, I'm sorry, but I don't command the Air Force!"

Even though Eighth Army and Fifth Air Force made serious efforts to establish all the personnel and communications elements of the AGOS request and direction organization, the Air Force's lack of interest and ability in close air support still discouraged ground commanders from making pre-attack requests. The system virtually guaranteed that emergency requests would be answered late, if at all. With their own TACPs at the battalion level, the Marines could and did short circuit the system by making emergency requests to an air-borne Mosquito, who would then divert either outgoing or returning interdiction strikes to the Marines and release direction of the strikes to the forward air controllers. If the attacking aircraft happened to be flown by trained Marines, so much the better. The 1st Marine Division FACs, however, reported that in April 1951 the JOC had answered 95 percent of their requests, but only 40 percent of the missions were flown by adequate numbers of aircraft, properly armed, and arrived in time to make some difference in the battle. In the meantime losses of aircraft and pilots soared in the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, in part because non-Marine controllers provided poor information about the terrain and enemy situation. In April 1951, the Marines lost 16 aircraft and 10 pilots (one captured, nine killed) to enemy ground fire.

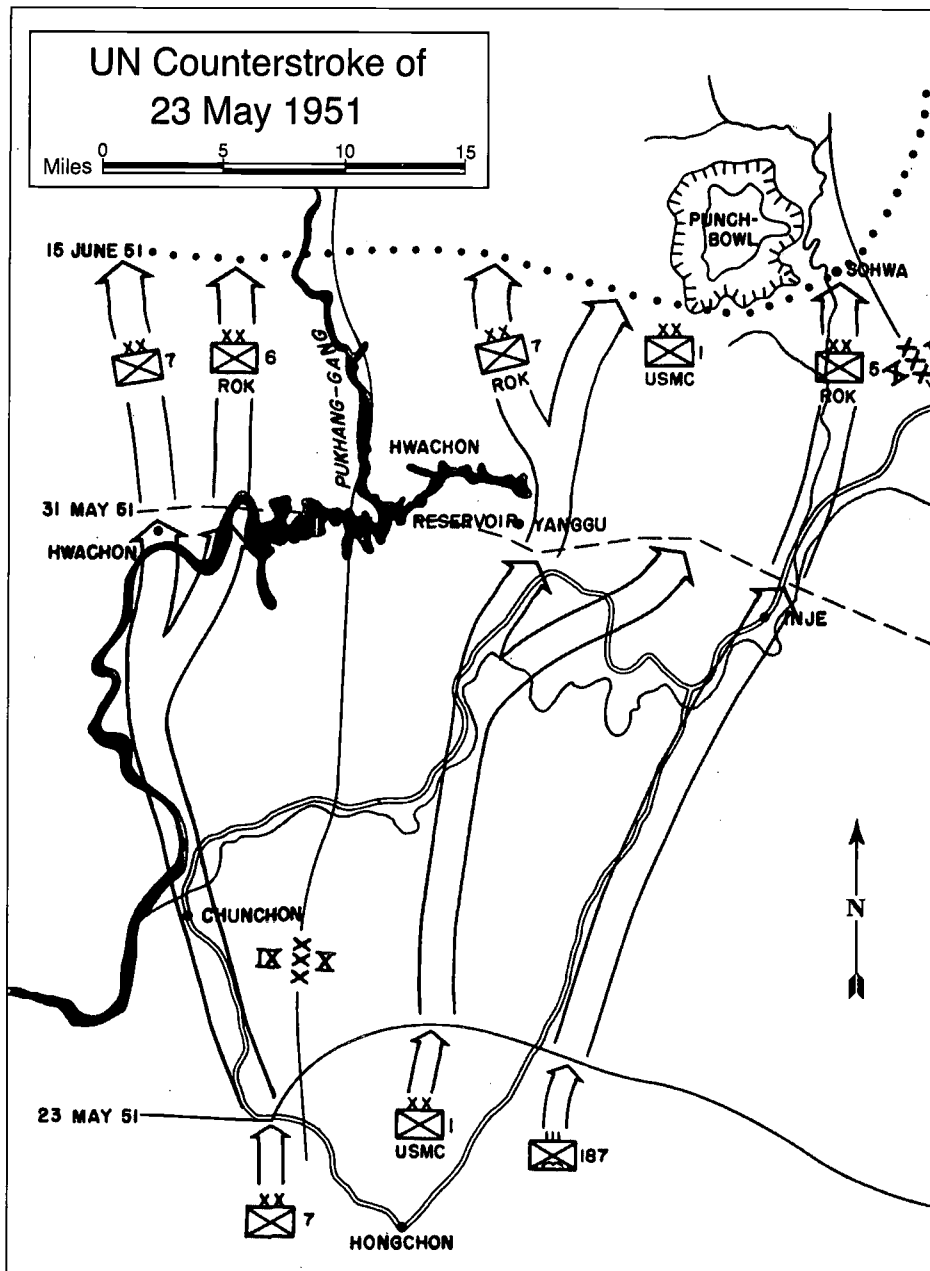
Although X Corps received ample close air support during the Fifth Offensive (Second Phase), Almond still criticized the AGOS practices. Major General Gerald C. Thomas entered the fray when he learned that his division had received only two-thirds of its requested air strikes in late May. Only about half of the delivered sorties were effective, and almost all were over an hour or more late. The only concession Almond and Thomas received was the stationing of one mixed Corsair squadron from Marine Aircraft Group 12 at K-46 a primitive strip near Hoengsong, but the JOC (Kimpo Airfield) still had to approve the missions. With the AGOS still in place—albeit somewhat more efficient and flexible—the war against the *niupitang* Chinese and North Korean defenders would go on—and the 1st Marine Division would indeed get stuck.

---

ed everywhere—most planted by shadowy Soviet sowers in the worlds' capitals and at the United Nations. The Joint Chiefs of Staff kept General Matthew B. Ridgway informed on the flood of speculation and hope. Until the last week of May, however, Ridgway had no reason to link his sense of the strategic shifts underway with the continuing operations in Korea.

Then Van Fleet, pressed by Almond, proposed a significant change in the exploitation campaign that followed the defeat of the Fifth Offensive. When the bulk of the Chinese forces had already escaped the bag between X Corps and ROK I Corps, Van Fleet proposed a series of amphibious envelopments up the east coast that would conclude with the cre-

ation of an enclave at Tongchon, still short of Wonsan, but well north of the "Iron Triangle," the central Korean network of transportation connections and mountain corridors bounded by Chorwon-Pyonggang-Kumhwa from west to east. Ridgway and Van Fleet agreed with Almond that control of the "Iron Triangle," even from Tongchon, would give either



side an advantage in ending or continuing the war.

General Ridgway, however, did not agree that Van Fleet's proposed Operation Overwhelming could be mounted because of resistance in Washington and sheer operational feasibility. Even a modest shore-to-shore movement would require disengaging the 1st Marine Division and (probably) the 3d Infantry Division and transporting them to a port for embarkation. From Ridgway's perspective, time was of the essence, and the requirements of Overwhelming were too over-

whelming with truce talks in the wind. Ridgway's greatest fear was that someone would give away the territorial gains already made in May and the additional ground he wanted to control in June after Operation Piledriver, a straight-ahead push by all four of Van Fleet's corps. The Eighth Army's goal would be the seizure and defense of a cross-peninsula line (Wyoming-Kansas) that would retake Kaesong, hold the mountain ranges and passes northwest of the Imjin River, secure at least part of the "Iron Triangle," and hold the

mountains north of the Hwachon Reservoir all the way to the coast at Tongchon. Anticipating that a ceasefire would entail the creation of some sort of territorial buffer zone, Ridgway wanted to reach a line (Kansas) well north of the Wyoming Line, his non-negotiable position for ensuring the ground defense of the expanded Republic of Korea.

Two other considerations shaped Ridgway's thinking about the conduct of the war. Some of the general's critics and champions later suggested that he had become too interested in his personal goal of becoming Army chief of staff or faint-hearted at the prospect of excessive American casualties in Korea. Ridgway's ambition was well-known to his Army peers, but he realized that trying to please Washington was a fool's errand. Nor had Ridgway, notoriously ruthless in relieving non-fighters, suddenly become casualty-shy. He simply saw no purpose in risking lives in adventures that probably would not produce the promised results. Moreover, Ridgway had become convinced that air power could give him an offensive option to punish the Communist armies beyond bearing, his own high explosive, high altitude version of *niupitang*. Recent changes in the Air Force high command in the war zone placed very aggressive and persuasive air generals in Ridgway's inner council. General Otto P. Weyland, the Far East Air Forces director of operations since early in the war, became the commander, and Lieutenant General Frank F. Everest assumed command of the Fifth Air Force. Both Weyland and Everest, tactical aviation commanders in World War II, championed aerial interdiction as the most decisive way to use air power in a war like the Korean