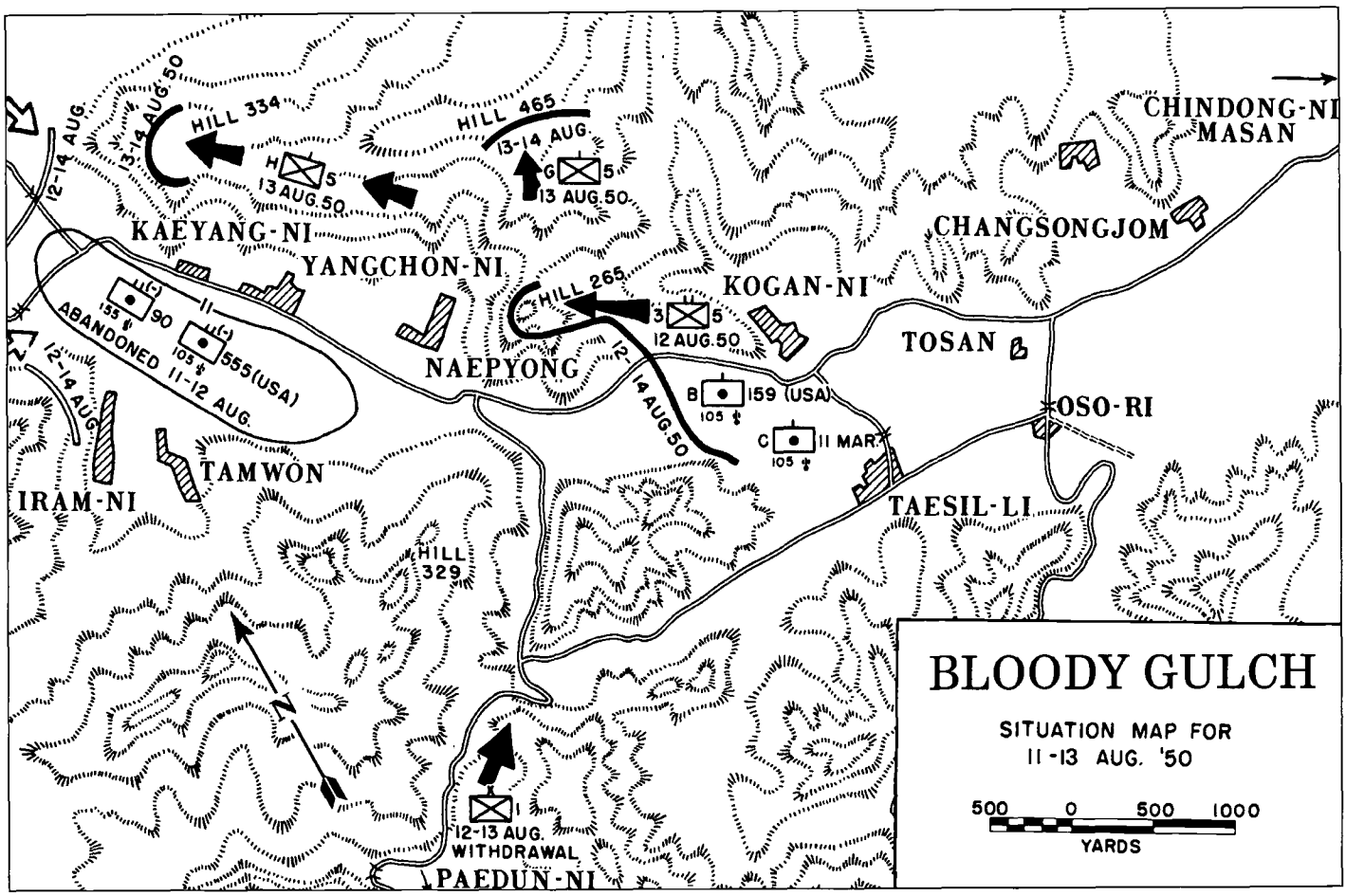


Marine column, and a squad leader in the 3d Battalion, Corporal Donald D. Sowl, was later awarded the Army's Distinguished Service Cross by order of General MacArthur.

There was a final flourish at the end of the day. A number of the enemy was spotted sneaking up the reverse slope of one of the hills. A veteran noncommissioned officer took a squad, deployed them along the ridgeline, and told them to wait silently. When the NKPA soldiers got within 75 feet, the sergeant gave his men the signal, and they poured out a sheet of fire. All 39 of the attackers were killed instantly, except for the officer leading them who was wounded and captured. Turned over to South Korean police to take back to the battalion CP for interrogation, the enemy officer did not survive the trip. As Geer wryly observed: "In the future they [the Marines] would conduct their own prisoners to the rear."

With all units dug in for the night, a rice paddy area of 1,000 yards between the two companies of the 1st Battalion was covered by the preregistered fire of mortars and artillery in case the enemy had any thoughts of a night attack. The brigade had now covered 29 miles of road (and much more counting the interminable distances up and down hills) in four short days. It had defeated the NKPA in every encounter, and here it was poised for the short step into Sachon. Next stop after that was the final objective, Chinju, now within easy reach of the hard-hitting brigade. Again, things looked good—too good.

This time the surprise came not from the NKPA in front but from the U.S. Army in the rear. Craig had received orders from Kean late in the morning of the day just ended, 12 August, to send without delay a reinforced battalion all the way back to the original starting point of the task force's drive, Chindong-ni. The Army's 5th RCT was in trouble again; its "push" towards Chinju had totally bogged down in what one account called "an epic disaster." With only two battalions left, Craig noted in his understated way that "the consequence was that our right flank . . . was exposed. There were many North Korean troops in that area, and we were, more or less, out on a limb at Sachon." Now the NKPA was cutting the main supply route behind the 5th RCT, and three batteries of the 555th and 90th Field Artillery Battalions had been completely overrun by the enemy. The Marine battalion was urgently needed to rescue the survivors from the shambles and restore the tactical situation.

The call from Kean began a hectic afternoon for Craig. Lynn

Montross in his book, *Cavalry of the Sky*, stressed the crucial mobility Craig enjoyed by repeated use of the helicopter. In a single afternoon, he took off from his CP at Kosong, then made two landings to give orders to his regimental commander, Murray, and to Taplett for the roadlift of the 3d Battalion to the crisis spot. Montross continued the story:

> Next, he spotted two columns of Marine trucks from the air and landed twice more to direct them to dump their loads and provide transportation for the troops. His G-3 [operations officer] and the battalion commander had meanwhile been sent ahead by helicopter to reconnoiter the objective area and plan for the Marines to deploy and attack upon arrival. Owing to these preparations, the assault troops seized part of the enemy position before darkness.

This fluid movement of Craig's enabled him, as a finale, to observe the start of the sunset attack enroute to a conference with Kean at Masan. While there he got the disheartening news that Walker wanted him to withdraw the brigade at daybreak. It was a gloomy ride for Craig back to his CP where he landed in early darkness.

The meeting with Kean not only confirmed the overwhelming problems of the 5th RCT, but also brought still more ominous news. The operations of Task Force Kean had been in the far southwestern sector of the Pusan Perimeter. Now the NKPA had crossed the Naktong River in the west center of the perimeter, broken the Army's lines, and were threatening to unhinge the entire defense of the peninsula. It was a time of real crisis, and Walker was calling on his battle-proven "fire brigade" to save the situation. This presented Craig with an even bleaker picture: he had to pull the rest of his brigade out of its successful drive toward Sachon and rush it north to stem the enemy breakthrough.

Withdrawal in the face of an aggressive enemy is one of the more difficult military operations. Newton, commander of the 1st Battalion, had gotten the word from Murray at midnight on 12 August to withdraw his men from their hilltop positions and form up on the road below at 0630 the following morning. There trucks would move them to their next combat assignment—unknown, as usual, to the men who would do the fighting.

Before it could get to the road, as the 1st Battalion was preparing to evacuate its positions on Hill 202, it was hit by a heavy assault. The veteran soldiers of the *6th Infantry Division* were experts at night attacks, and at 0450 they struck. It was close-in work. For a while, the outcome was in doubt. Separated from Company A, Company B was on its own. Its entire left flank was overrun, the communications wire was cut, and two Marine machine guns were captured and turned on the company. Fighting back face-to-face, the Marines called in fire from their 81mm and 4.2-inch mortars, together with artillery and 3.5-inch rocket rounds that pinpointed the enemy with fire barely in front of the defenders. Finally, at dawn, the situation was stabilized.

There now occurred "one of the most demoralizing incidents in Company B's experience for the entire campaign," as Fenton later commented. Tobin was ready at first light to move back and recover the wounded and missing men, just as Marine tradition (and Craig) had promised. It was not to be. Iron-clad orders from Walker to Craig to Murray to Newton forced an immediate withdrawal, in spite of Tobin's pleadings.

Fenton summarized the unanimous feeling:

> Twenty-nine bloody, sweating miles down the drain . . . . The men couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe it. It didn't seem possible, with all the lives we'd lost taking this ground, that we'd now just walk off and leave it. Baker Company's casualties for the morning's counterattack alone were 12 dead, 16 wounded, and 9 missing in action. And I'm certain those last nine were dead, too.
>
> I found it difficult to see men, veterans of the last war, older guys, sitting by the side of the road crying. They just didn't give a hoot. They were tired, disgusted. People just couldn't understand this part of the war.

A Relief Force

Leaving the 1st and 2d Battalions temporarily in the positions they had won in the Changchon area, Craig moved quickly on 12 August to organize the deployment of his 3d Battalion as a relief force for the overrun Army field artillery battalions. The orders from Kean had come at 1130 and by 1300 the riflemen and an artillery battery were in the trucks, on their way. A half hour later Taplett and the brigade operations officer, Lieutenant Colonel Stewart, were airborne to scout the disaster area by helicopter. They saw plenty of trouble: artillery pieces in disarray; jeeps on fire; American bodies lying in a stream bed; and, incon-

gruously, one white table set in the midst of it all. The Army had "estimated" that 2,000 to 2,500 NKPA troops had infiltrated the area, smashed the Army artillery units, and were threatening the main supply route, so Taplett had originally presumed that there would be heavy combat for his battalion when it arrived. At the scene he saw no evidence of any such quantity of NKPA, and he strongly doubted the estimate.

The chaotic situation the Marines now saw had its roots in the events of the preceding day, 11 August. Without opposition, the 5th RCT had advanced just five miles from where it had started at the infamous road junction to a small village called Pongam-ni. The 555th "Triple Nickel" and 90th Field Artillery Battalions were in support, but were not protected or prepared for an enemy attack.

Marine procedures were much different. Craig later commented on this:

> The artillery had been trained in Pendleton in the methods of security. They were armed with bazookas, .50 calibers, and everything that the infantrymen would need to defend a position, and they were well trained in defense of their artillery positions. And they from that [first] day on took up defensive positions wherever they moved.
>
> As a result we never had a gun overrun. There were attempts at sniping and so forth, but we never had a gun taken or overrun; whereas I notice that the Army on a number of occasions in the perimeter lost whole batteries. It was simply, I think, because the artillerymen were not trained along the same lines as the Marines.

At this time, Kean was under heavy pressure from Walker to get the 5th RCT to leap ahead. So the division commander ordered his regimental commander (Colonel Godwin L. Ordway) to move part of his units quickly forward through the pass near Pongam-ni. Then there was indecision, delay, conflicting orders, and repeated failures in radio communications. As a result, part of the regiment went through the pass that night, and part stopped at Pongam-ni. With his command thus split up, and with enemy fire falling on the supply route to his rear, Ordway was in a difficult situation. It got worse after midnight on 11 August when telephone and radio communications with the artillery battalions was lost and the sounds of battle came from their direction. With the NKPA now on the high ground above him, Ordway decided at 0400 on 12 August to try to move the rest of his troops through the pass. A massive traffic jam ensued. As the official Army history noted: "During the hour or more before daylight, no vehicle in Ordway's range of vision moved more than 10 or 20 feet at a time."

As the infantry slowly moved out, the enemy quickly moved into the valley. Now the Army artillery, stalled behind the traffic jam, was a sitting duck. NKPA tanks and self-propelled guns were able to "approach undetected and unopposed, almost to point-blank range, and with completely disastrous effects." Enemy infantry from the *13th Regiment* of the *6th Division* closed in and added its firepower. It was a slaughter, and the artillery was completely overrun. A traumatic phone call from Brigadier General George B. Barth, USA, the 25th Division artillery commander, to Kean revealed the scope of the disaster and led Kean to order the rescue mission by the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines.

Kean also ordered a battalion of the 24th Infantry to bring relief by an attack towards Pongam-ni. This effort went nowhere on 12 August, and by the next day it was still two and a half miles from the artillery positions. The 555th had lost six of its 105mm howitzers, and the 90th had lost all six of the 155mm howitzers in one of its batteries. Along with some 300 men, probably 100 vehicles had been captured or destroyed (although the NKPA claimed an inflated 157 vehicles and 13 tanks). The Army had given the site the name "Bloody Gulch."

This was the grim situation that Taplett faced when his helicopter arrived on 12 August. He immediately had the aircraft land and he looked for the liaison officer who was supposed to meet him, now that he was coming under the operational control of the Army's 25th Infantry Division. No sign of any such person.

To try to get some information, Taplett was finally able to tap into a telephone line to the division headquarters in the rear and ask for orders. The reply was to "do what he thought was proper." That vague verbal order was all the leeway Taplett needed for immediate action. A helicopter reconnaissance was followed by a juncture with his troops. Then he led them by air to the valley from where he planned to attack the commanding ridges.

Less than three hours after boarding their trucks, the men of the 3d Battalion were at their assembly area, ready to jump off in an attack on a cold, rainy, miserable day. Taplett aggressively delayed only 15 minutes for an artillery preparation and some napalm runs by Marine Corsairs,

and then moved out the riflemen. Without a single casualty, they soon reached the top of the first ridge. There they found signs that a substantial body of enemy troops had made a hasty departure, but this was a far cry from the resistance they had expected from the "2,000" or so enemy troops that Ordway had estimated had wreaked such havoc.

At 1900 Barth arrived to take command. Not knowing Taplett's style, he asked when the Marines would be ready to attack. Taplett presumably enjoyed a response one can easily imagine, "Sir, we've already done that, and my men are now digging in on top of the ridge." Barth graciously congratulated him.

The next morning, 13 August, the 3d Battalion attacked to secure the final ridges overlooking the pitiful remnants of the lost artillery. Again, there was no opposition, and by 1000 they were on top of their objectives. Craig later commented: "We found quite a number of Army artillerymen scattered through the area, hiding in various places." Besides those rescued by the Marines, some had fled and struggled back to safety with the 25th Division.

Taplett's men were now ready to go down, clean out any enemy, and retrieve the artillery pieces in the valley, but the Marines once more got orders that they could not take the objective they were poised to seize, but must, instead, move to the rear to meet the new enemy threat along the Naktong.

That marked the final episode in the Marine mission to aid the Army's 5th RCT. With all troops, Marine and Army, now pulled back to their starting point at Chindong-ni, it was the end of the offensive to occupy Chinju and, on 16 August, Task Force Kean was dissolved.

First Week's Results

Things had gone badly for the 5th RCT and its artillery, and the commanding officers of the regiment and the "Triple Nickel" battalion were both relieved of duty. Higher Army echelons were not pleased with their leadership or the morale and combat effectiveness of their men.

Craig, on the other hand, was pleased. He had seen his brigade drive forward with vigor and professional skill. His officers were constantly aggressive, and the riflemen had done very well under fire. He noted that his men were "well trained and well led" by outstanding noncommissioned officers and "professional" officers who "knew their stuff." The reason for the brigade's achievements were clear to Craig:

> We were a generation of officers who grew up with the Marine Corps' standing operating procedures (SOPs) for amphibious operations. These were my "Bible" when I organized and trained an earlier Marine brigade on Guam during the period 1947-1949. During World War II we had repeatedly tested and refined our organization and techniques in landings all over the Pacific. These same SOPs enabled us to deploy to Korea quickly and fight effectively when we got there.

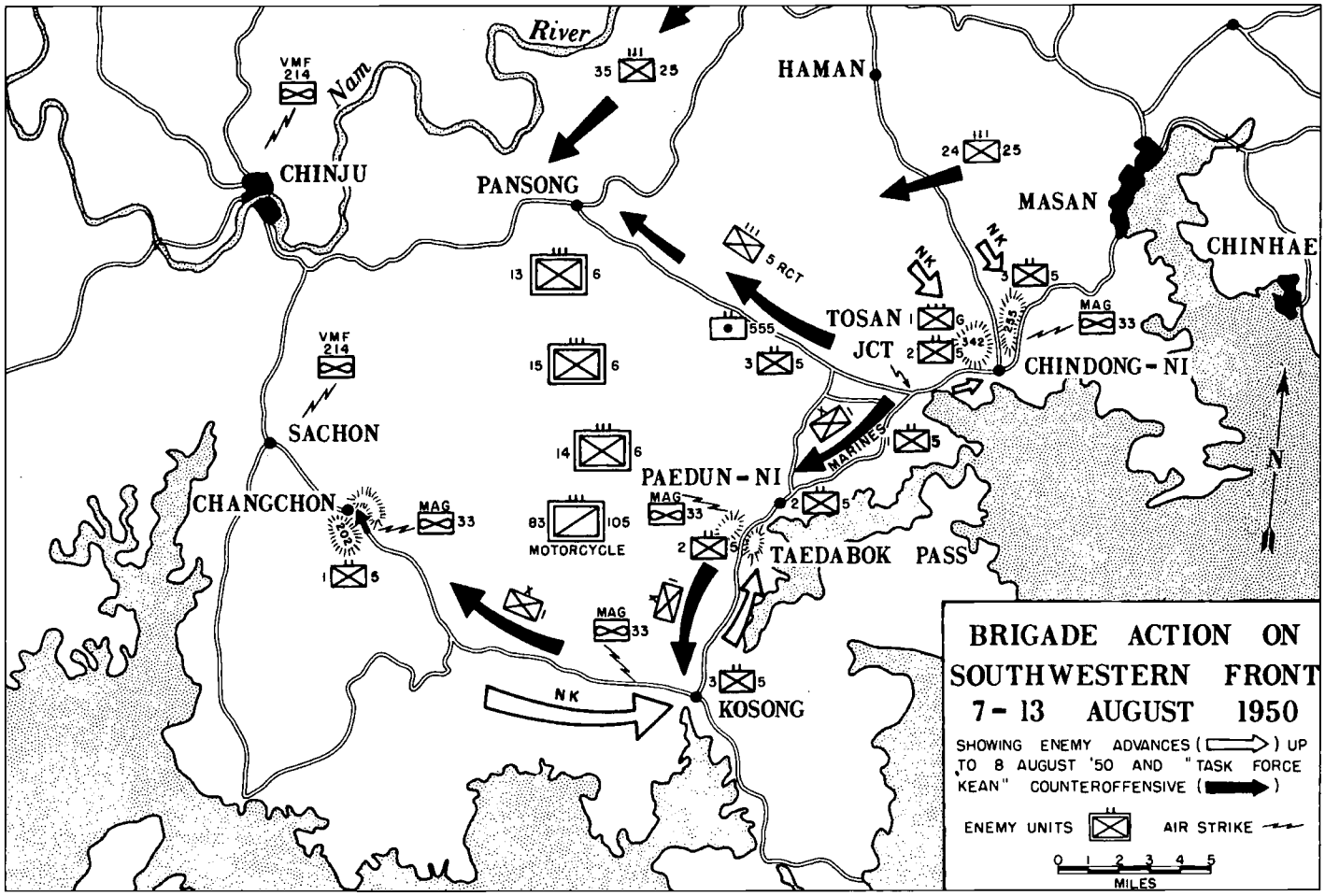
Equally important, the supporting arms had coordinated well with the infantrymen, with the close air support of MAG-33 demonstrating a wholly new element in the Korean War, flying more than 400 sorties in support of the brigade and other units of the Eighth Army. The Marines had twice been on the verge of seizing their objectives—first at Sachon-Chinju and then the recovery of the Army artillery—only to be pulled back by the strategic needs of the Eighth Army. Geer in his account concluded:

> The brigade came out of Changallon [Changchon] physically tough and psychologically hard . . . . They knew the enemy to be a vicious, skillfully led and well-equipped foe that could inflict heavy casualties in any action. They were prepared to meet with heavy losses and to carry on the attack, and were openly scornful of units unable to face these hard facts of war.

There had been a price, however. The brigade had had a total of 315 casualties, with 66 killed or died of wounds, 240 wounded, and 9 missing in action (when the 1st Battalion had not been allowed to recover them).

The action of that week had brought results on a wider, strategic scale. While there had been a failure to occupy Chinju, Task Force Kean had nevertheless been the first real American offensive of the Korean War. In a report to the United Nations, General MacArthur stated that "this attack not only secured the southern approaches to the beachhead, but also showed that the North Korean forces will not hold under attack."

The official Army history acknowledged in summary that "the task force had not accomplished what Eighth Army had believed to be easily possible—the winning and holding of the Chinju pass line," and, omitting any reference to the dramatic advance of the Marine brigade, admitted that the rest of the task force, "after a week of fighting, . . . was back



approximately in the positions from which it had started its attack." That history, however, went on to note "certain beneficial results . . . . It chanced to meet head-on the North Korean *6th Division* attack against the Masan position, and first stopped it and then hurled it back . . . . Task Force Kean also gained the time needed to organize and wire in the defenses that were to hold the enemy out of Masan during the critical period ahead."

The official Marine history could afford to be positive about the brigade's achievements:

> The Communist drive in this sensitive area came closest of all NKPA thrusts to the vital UN supply port of Pusan. Up to that time the NKPA units spearheading the advance—the *6th Infantry Division* and the *83d Motorcycle Regiment*—had never suffered a reverse worth mentioning since the outset of the invasion. Then the counterattack by the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade hurled the enemy back 26 miles in 4 days from the Chindong-ni area to Sachon.

It was estimated that the Marine air-ground team killed and wounded 1,900 of the enemy while destroying nearly all the vehicles of an NKPA motorized battalion in addition to infantry armament and equipment. The enemy threat in this critical area was nullified for the time being, and

A Marine skirmish line attacking over exposed ground to a nearby treeless hillcrest.

Photo by David Douglas Duncan

never again became so serious. Marine efforts assisted Army units of Task Force Kean in taking new defensive positions and defending them with fewer troops, thus freeing some elements for employment on other fronts. Finally, the Marines earned more time and space for the building up of Eighth Army forces in preparation for a decisive UN counteroffensive.

Interlude

With the conclusion of the drive towards Sachon, the Marines hoped for a respite before the next call to combat, which they knew was sure to come. Craig, however, had received orders at 0130, 14 August, to move his brigade as soon as possible to a place called Miryang. Using rail, trucks, and even an LST, his battalions made the trip of 75 miles in 26 hours. When the "Fire Brigade" arrived there, it was desperately needed in a new crisis.

Before the men moved out for combat, there was one blessed—though brief—interlude of relaxation: Marines from the rear, from staff positions, even tankers and artillerymen, were fed into the depleted rifle companies. (Another of the many times when there was a vital payoff for the Marine maxim, roughly: "No matter what your ultimate assignment may be, you will be trained first as a rifleman!") There was a pleasant grove of trees at Miryang, and the men could rest in the shade, get their first-ever bath in the river there, eat their first hot food, and exchange filthy, rotted uniforms for a fresh issue. Fegan commented: "Not only did I smell to high heaven, I also had dried blood all over my jacket."

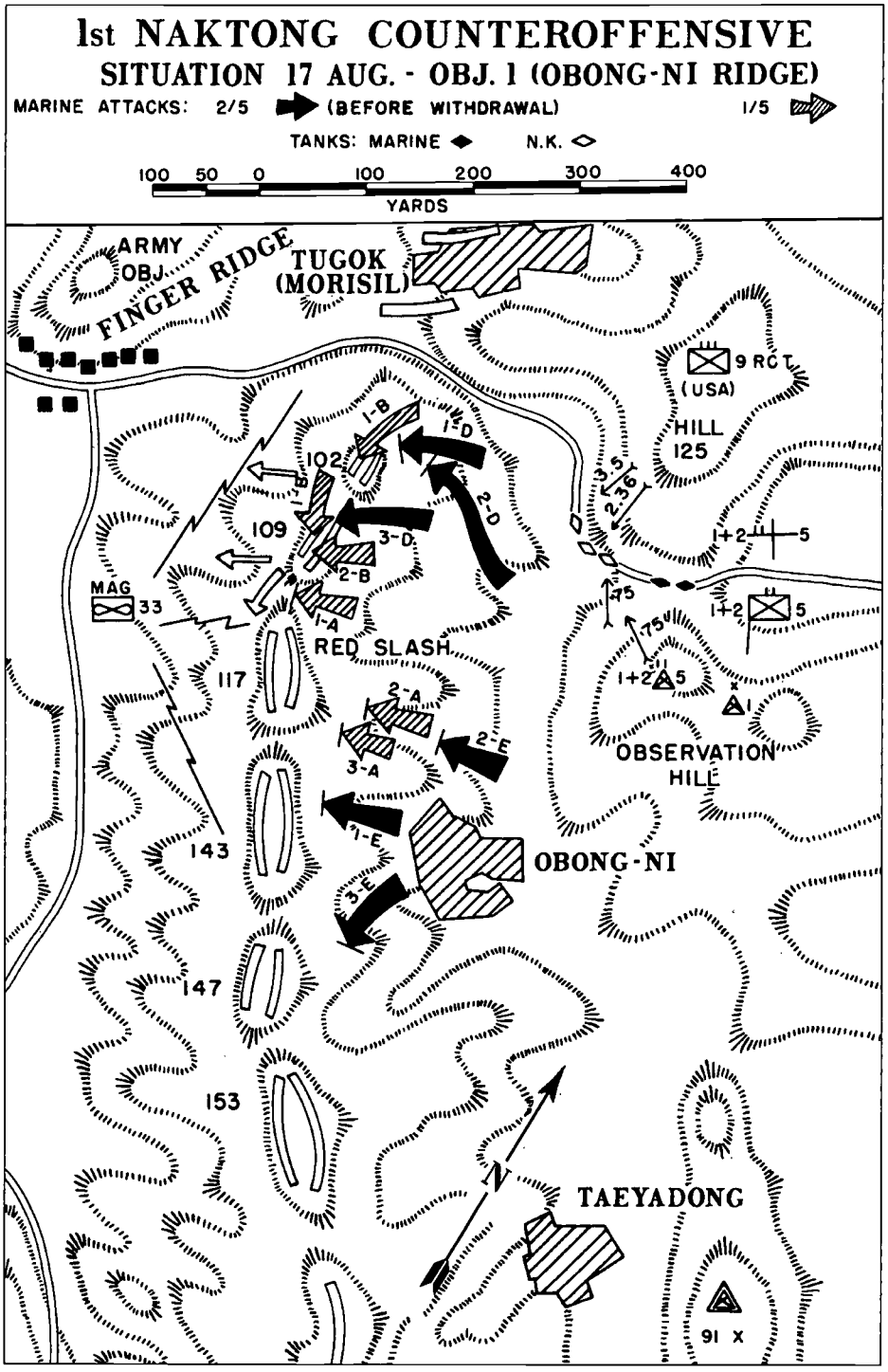
That rest period was soon over. Upon arrival at Miryang, the brigade was placed under the operational control of the Army's 24th Infantry Division to meet a new threat. The situation was indeed critical. Ten days before, author Russell Spurr asserts, General Kim Chaek, front commander of the NKPA, had addressed his staff. Moving from the past (Sachon) battle to the forthcoming (Naktong) attack, he reputedly acknowledged that losses had been heavy, with the *6th Division* "reduced by half in the past week." He then went on to issue a clarion call for victory:

> The situation is not irretrievable. We have committed only a portion of our strength. I am therefore ordering the *4th Guards Division* to cross the Naktong River north of the present battlefield, capture Yongsan, and drive on to Miryang. This as you can see from the map, will sever the main supply route between Pusan and U.S. headquarters in Taegu; if we succeed, and I trust we shall, the northern part of the perimeter will collapse. It is defended largely by puppet troops and we know how they react when outflanked.

Enemy Breakthrough

The commander of the *4th Division* was Major General Lee Kwon Mu, a hardened professional who had fought with the Communists in China and served as a lieutenant in the Russian Army. Awarded North Korea's highest military decorations, the Order of Hero of the Korean Democratic People's Republic, and the National Flag, First Class, for his earlier triumphs in South Korea, Mu had moved his 7,000 men into position on 4 August for a crucial attack across the Naktong River. The *4th Division* was a crack unit, given the honorary title of the *"Seoul" Division* for its triumphant earlier capture of the capital of South Korea. Leading the way were the *4th, 16th, and 18th Infantry Regiments.* They had moved stealthily into action the night of 5 August, wading across the Naktong under cover of darkness, while machine guns were pulled along on crude rafts. By the morning of 6 August, 1,000 of them had established a position on the east side, soon beefed up by artillery brought across the Naktong on a hidden, underwater bridge the NKPA had secretly constructed. This assault had meant the breaching of the last natural barrier which was counted on to protect the vital lifeline from Taegu to Pusan. It was at Taegu that General Walker had his headquarters for direction of the defense of the Pusan Perimeter.

This attack had come as a surprise to Brigadier General John H. Church, commander of the 24th Infantry Division. The subsequent threat was obvious. From the hills the NKPA had seized it dominated the road to Yongsan, five miles away. Twenty-five miles beyond that lay Miryang, and then the vital Pusan-Taegu main supply route (MSR). As Toland recorded: "Panic reached the government offices in Taegu." Walker, however, had remained cool, and the Army had entered a period of continuous battle. Some units were overrun and some soldiers had fled as NKPA soldiers appeared on flanks and rear. In a confusing period of separate confrontations, Army troops had been unable to push the NKPA here, and at another point in the north, back across the Naktong.



'Fire Brigade': Crisis Number Two

That was when Walker called in the Marines. Thus, on 15 August, Craig met with Church. Walker had earlier told Church, "I am going to give you the Marine Brigade. I want this situation cleaned up—and quick!" Craig made his plans following his meeting with Church. The brigade would move out of Miryang on 16 August to go on the attack. Geer records a British military observer who saw them getting started and sent a dispatch to Tokyo. He emphasized a "critical" situation in which Miryang could well be lost, then Taegu would become untenable, and "we will be faced with a withdrawal from Korea." In spite of these grim prospects, he got a premonition about the brigade. In spite of the "impossible odds" that he felt it faced, he described his gut feeling that it would check the *NKPA* advance:

> I realize my expression of hope is unsound, but these Marines have the swagger, confidence and hardness that must have been in Stonewall Jackson's Army of the Shenandoah. They remind me of the Coldstreams at Dunkerque. Upon this thin line of reasoning, I cling to the hope of victory.

That night, the tone of the attack was set when Murray told Newton: "You must take that ground tomorrow! You have to get on that ridge and take it! Understood?" Newton replied: "Understood! Understood! This battalion goes only one way—straight ahead!"

The brigade was to jump off at 0800 on 17 August as part of a planned full-scale effort by the Army's 24th Division, reinforced by the 9th Infantry Regiment. There was a happy history of linkage between the Marines and the 9th Infantry. They had served together in the battle for Tientsin during the Boxer Rebellion in China at the turn of the century, and again in the 2d Infantry Division in France during World War I. Now the 9th would operate on the brigade's right, with the Marines as the left wing of the attack. Three objective lines were assigned to the brigade, with the first being Obong-ni Ridge. Craig and Murray made an on-the-spot reconnaissance of the terrain which was a jumbled mass of hills and gullies. Because of the type of terrain to the left and the presence of the Army's 9th Regiment to the right, the only, reluctant choice was a frontal attack.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A2246

Marches had the men well spaced out to avoid unnecessary casualties. As this column heads toward its objective, the man second from the rear carries a flame thrower, while the man in front of him has a 3.5-inch rocket launcher. This picture was taken during a Naktong battle, showing a burning enemy tank, with the Marines carefully circling around it to avoid any explosion of its ammunition.

The shift to the new crisis area was a pressure-laden one for the Marines. Stewart, Craig's operations officer (G-3), remembered in later years that he was advised that the Naktong River line had been broken through, threatening the Pusan-Taegu MSR, and the brigade had to move there immediately to restore the front. He recalled:

> Things were so hectic that Roise, who was commanding the 2d Battalion, which was going on the line below Masan in a defensive position, received minimum orders to move. In fact, our radio contact was out and I wrote on a little piece of brown paper, "These are your trucks, move to Naktong at once."

Those were the only orders Roise ever got to move to the Naktong front. But they were all he needed in the hectic situation in which the Marines found themselves, for, when only a portion of the promised trucks showed up, many men in the battalion had to march until 0130 the next morning to reach the jump-off point for their attack a few hours later.

Waiting for the Marines, well dug-in and confident of victory, were the *18th Regiment* and a battalion of the *16th Regiment* of the NKPA *4th Division.* Geer quotes a speech by Colonel Chang Ky Dok, the regiment's veteran commanding officer:

> Intelligence says we are to expect an attack by American Marines. To us comes the honor of being the first to defeat these Marines soldiers. We will win where others have failed. I consider our positions impregnable. We occupy the high ground and they must attack up a steep slope. Go to your men and tell them there will be no retreat. I will take instant action against anyone who shows weakness.

Preparation by supporting units for the Marine riflemen's attack was inadequate. Artillery fire was ineffective. When the enemy positions were later examined, the foxholes were found to be very deep, sited along the length of the ridge slightly on the reverse slope. Thus shellfire on the forward slopes caused few casualties, nor could artillery get a trajectory to reach the enemy on the reverse slopes. Adding to the problem, there was only one air strike. Moreover, there would be little or no natural cover for the men who had to climb toward the six hills of Obong-ni, called by the news correspondents "No Name Ridge."

The 2d Battalion Attacks

Murray had an agreement with the Army's 9th Infantry on the right flank that the Marines would attack first, supported by fire from the 9th. He picked Roise's 2d Battalion to lead off. It was a very thin front line for such a crucial moment: four understrength platoons totaling only 130 men from Companies D and E to lead the assault (with two platoons as reserves). "Red Slash Hill" was to be their dividing line.

One platoon of Company E, led by Second Lieutenant Nickolas D. Arkadis, hit the village of Obong-ni at the foot of two of the company objectives: Hills 143 and 147. Driving ahead through heavy fire, the platoon fought its way to the slopes beyond. Arkadis' leadership was later recognized by the award of a Silver Star.

Now both companies were out in the open, sometimes forced to crawl upwards, met with a continuous hail of enemy machine gun and mortar fire with barrages of

grenades. Casualties mounted rapidly. Joseph C. Goulden tells of a correspondent who was watching and described the bloody scene: "Hell burst around the Leathernecks as they moved up the barren face of the ridge. Everywhere along the assault line, men dropped. To continue looked impossible. But, all glory forever to the bravest men I ever saw, the line did not break. The casualties were unthinkable, but the assault force never turned back. It moved, fell down, got up and moved again."

One platoon of Company D, with only 15 men remaining, did claw its way to the top of Hill 109 on Obong-ni Ridge, but it was too weak and too isolated when reinforcements simply could not reach it, so it had to pull back off the crest. Second Lieutenant Michael J. Shinka, the platoon leader, later gave the details of that perilous struggle:

> Running short of ammo and taking casualties, with the shallow enemy slit trenches for cover, I decided to fall back until some of the fire on my left flank could be silenced. I gave the word to withdraw and take all wounded and weapons. About three-quarters of the way down, I had the men set up where cover was available. I had six men who were able to fight.
>
> I decided to go forward to find out if we had left any of our wounded. As I crawled along our former position (on the crest of Hill 109), I came across a wounded Marine between two dead. As I grabbed him under the arms and pulled him from the foxhole, a bullet shattered my chin. Blood ran into my throat and I couldn't breathe.

Shinka, after being hit again, did manage to survive, and was later awarded a Bronze Star Medal. Another Company D Marine, Staff Sergeant T. Albert Crowson, singlehandedly silenced two deadly machine gun emplacements and was awarded the Army's Distinguished Service Cross by order of General MacArthur.

By now, it had become clear that many of the casualties were caused by heavy enemy fire coming from the zone in front of the Army's 9th Regiment to hit the flank and rear of the Marines, and there had been no supporting fire from the 9th. Other problems arose when some men of Company E were nearing the crest which was their objective and they were hit by white phosphorus shells from "friendly" artillery fire. Then, later, some Marines were hit in a strafing attack by their own Corsairs.

By mid-day the men of the 2d Battalion, halfway up the hills, could do no more, having suffered 142 casualties, 60 percent of their original 240 riflemen. Murray ordered it to pull back, undoubtedly lamenting the fact that he did not have a third rifle company in the battalion, for it might well have seized the top of the ridge and held it. Craig stressed this point in a later interview, noting that "without a third company, or maneuver element, the battalion commanders were at a tactical disadvantage in every engagement. They lacked flexibility in the attack. On defense they had to scrape up whatever they could in order to have a reserve."

Pinpointing an example, Craig recalled:

> This condition became critical in the First Battle of the Naktong. 2d Battalion, 5th Marines' assault companies took heavy losses in the initial attack against Obong-ni Ridge, the strongpoint of the enemy's bridgehead over the Naktong. Since Roise had nothing left to use, the attack stalled.
>
> Murray then had to commit 1/5 [the 1st Battalion] prematurely to continue the attack. This took time, giving the enemy a breather right at the height of the battle. That night, when the enemy hit our positions on the ridge with a heavy counterattack,

A Marine tank bulldozer clears a destroyed NKPA T-34 tank from the road.
National Archives Photo (USMC) 127-N-A1338

Newton certainly could have used another company on line or in reserve. We were spread pretty thin, and it was nip and tuck on that ridge for several more hours.

The original battle plan had called for an attack in a column of battalions, with each battalion taking successively one of the series of three ridge lines (objectives 1, 2, and 3) that shielded the NKPA river crossing It was now painfully obvious that a sharp change must be made. Accordingly, Newton's 1st Battalion relieved the battered 2d on the hillsides at 1600 (17 August), with Company A replacing E, and B replacing D.

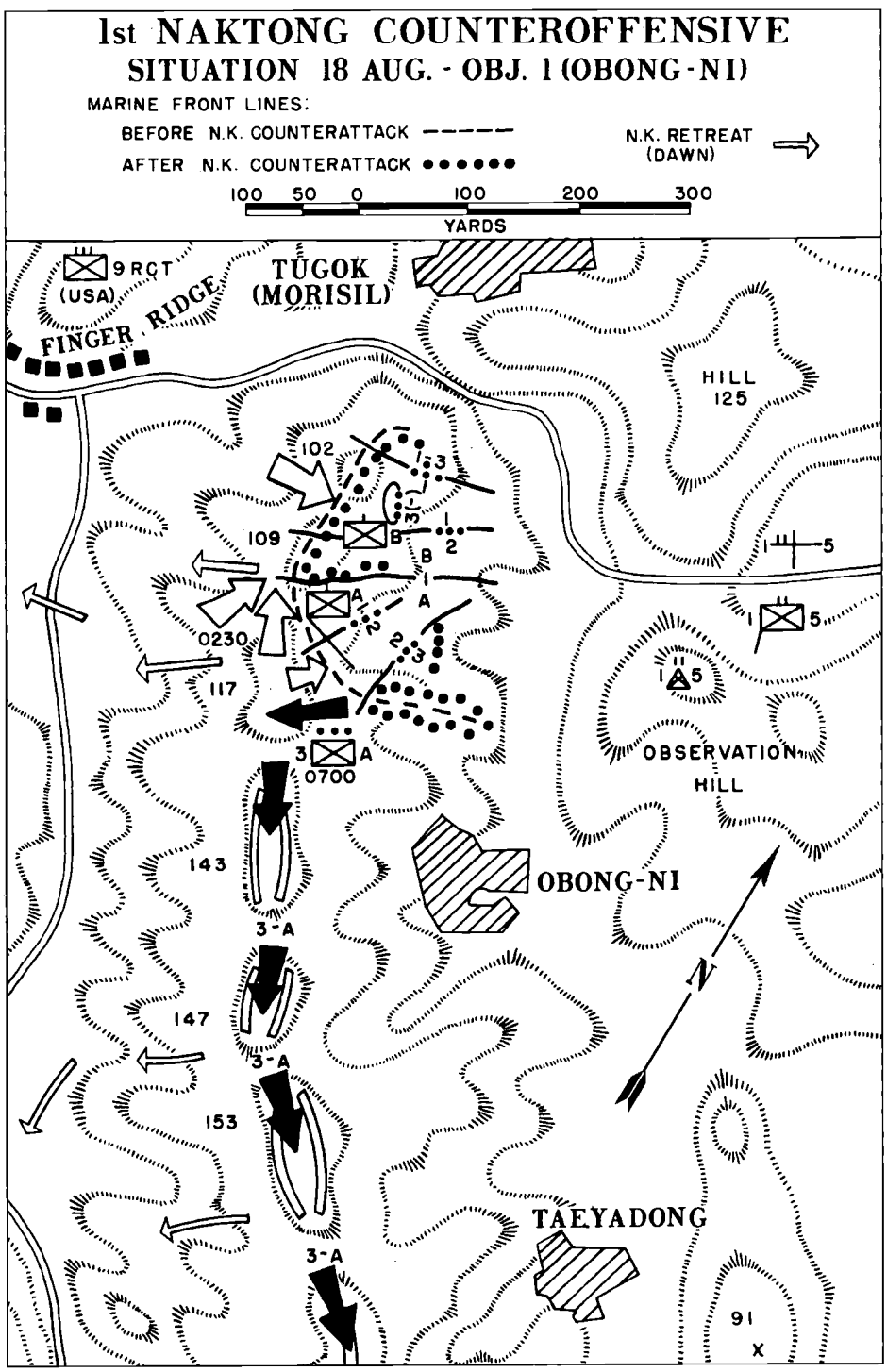
While the *18th Regiment* had hit the 2d Battalion hard, the bravery, skill, and determination of those Marines had caused serious losses in the enemy's ranks: 600 casualties and severe reductions in serviceable weapons. With his ammunition running low and no medical supplies so that most of his wounded men were dying, the NKPA commander's situation was critical, as described by Fehrenbach:

> He knew he could not withstand another day of American air and artillery pounding and a fresh Marine assault up the ridge. Because he had a captured American SCR-300 radio, tuned in on Marine frequencies, he knew that the 1st Battalion had relieved 2/5 along the front of Obong-ni, and he knew approximately where the companies of 1/5 were located, for the Marines talked a great deal over the air.

The 1st Battalion Attacks

The relief movement of the two battalions was covered by what the official Marine history described as "devastating fires" from the planes of MAG-33, the artillery of the 1st Battalion, 11th Marines, and the brigade's tank battalion. Then Companies A and B attacked up the daunting slopes. Simultaneously, after Murray had gone to see Church to request a change in the previously agreed-upon plan, the 9th Infantry jumped off in an attack. This eliminated the previous flanking fire on the Marines.

Helped by the advance bombardment, the two Marine companies were able to make slow (and costly) progress towards the crests. Company A attacked repeatedly, trying to reach the battalion's objective on the left: the tops of Hills 117 and 143. It proved impos-



sible, in spite of very aggressive leadership by the officers (and gunnery sergeants who replaced them as they fell). The company could get only part way up the slopes when it was "pinned down by a solid sheet of Communist fire . . . casualties bled [the] skirmish line white and finally brought it to a stop."

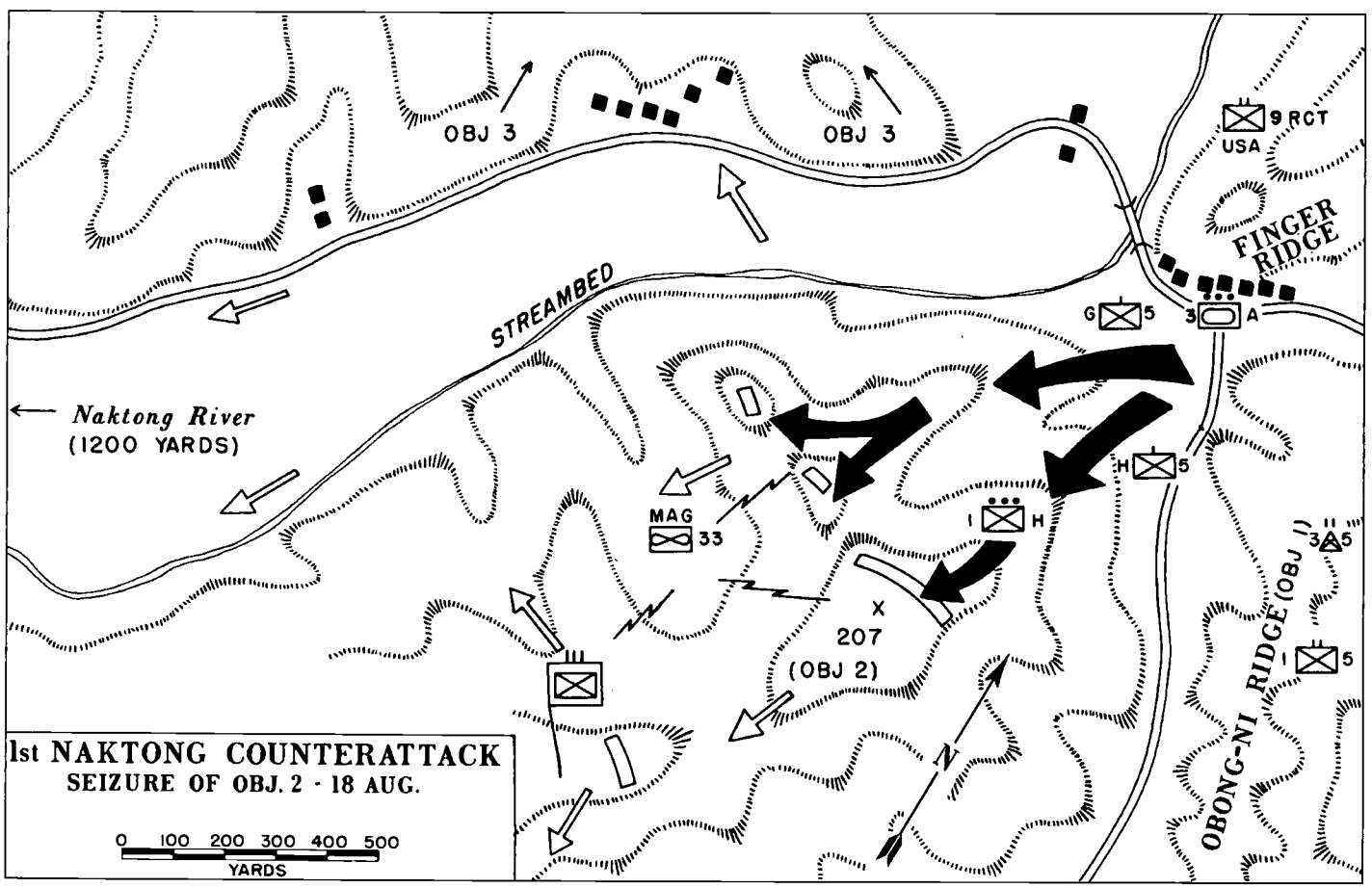
Herbert R. Luster, a private first class in Company A, remembered his own searing experience in this brutal battle:

> It was evident no one saw the enemy but me . . . . I pulled back the bolt to cock the action of the BAR, pushed off the safety, settled back on my right foot, and opened fire. The flying dirt and tracers told me where my rounds were going. I emptied the rifle . . . . So I pushed the release with my right thumb and pulled the empty magazine out, stuck it in my jacket pocket, loaded and raised my BAR to my shoulder. Before I got it all the way up, red dirt kicked up in my face. A big jerk at my right arm told me I was hit. I looked down and saw blood squirting onto my broken BAR stock.

As always, there were gory episodes. Second Lieutenant Francis W. Muetzel in Company A was in an abandoned machine gun emplacement with his company executive officer and a rifleman from the 3d Platoon. He later recalled:

> The use of the abandoned machine gun emplacement proved to be a mistake. Enemy mortars and artillery had already registered on it . . . . Without registration of any kind, four rounds of enemy 82mm mortar fire landed around it. The blast lifted me off the ground, my helmet flew off. A human body to my left disintegrated. Being rather shook up and unable to hear, I crawled back to the CP . . . . About the time my hearing and stability returned . . . I thought of the 3d Platoon rifleman . . . . I returned to look for him. One of the mortar rounds must have landed in the small of his back. Only a pelvis and legs were left. The stretcher-bearers gathered up the remains with a shovel.

On the other side of "Red Slash Hill" that was the dividing line, Company B made some progress until it was pinned down by heavy fire from a nearby village on its flank. Captain John L. Tobin was wounded, so Fenton took over as company commander. Calling in an



81mm mortar barrage from the battalion's weapons company, the riflemen were then able to lunge forward and seize the crests of Hills 102 and 109 by late afternoon (17 August).

The two battered companies settled down where they were and tied into each other to dig in night defensive positions. With the flood of casualties, the resulting manpower shortage caused the far left flank to dangle dangerously in the air. Newton threw together an improvised unit of men from his headquarters and service company personnel to cover that flank. The mortars and artillery were registered on probable enemy approach routes, including the crossing point on the Naktong River. Then their harassing fire missions went on all night to try to disrupt the enemy.

National Archives Photo (USMC) 127-N-A1160

Fire from supporting weapons was a crucial element as the rifle companies attacked. Above: 81mm mortars lay down a barrage. Below: a 75mm recoilless rifle blasts a specific target.

Smashing Enemy Tanks

At 2000 that night (17 August) the Marines had their first confrontation with the T-34 tanks of the NKPA. These were the tanks that had had such a fearsome reputation earlier in the war. The men of Company B from their hilltop perch saw four of them coming with a column of infantry, aimed to bypass the Marine riflemen, and, in a typical enemy tactic, probe to sow confusion amongst rear elements.

The Corsairs of MAG-33 were called in. They came roaring down, knocked out one tank, and scattered the accompanying enemy infantry. With a determination typ-

National Archives Photo (USMC) 127-N-A1461

ical of the hardy NKPA, the other three tanks came on.

When the news was flashed to Newton in his CP, he told Fenton to "let them go and they'd be dealt with in the rear." Back at Craig's brigade CP, there were two opposite reactions when the news arrived. A correspondent witnessed the scene: "Naval Captain Eugene Hering, brigade surgeon, jumped to his feet. "God Almighty!" he said. "The aid station's just a quarter of a mile from there! [Lieutenant (junior grade) Bentley] Nelson [one of the battalion's medical officers] won't leave his wounded! If those tanks break through . . . ." "They won't," the general said. "Newton will know what to do."

And he did. Summoning the Marine M-26 tanks and antitank weapons, Newton left the NKPA armor up to them. Fenton and the men of Company B had a ringside seat for the clash that followed. He later wrote:

> As the first tank rounded the corner down toward the 1st Battalion CP, it was met by 3.5" rocket fire from the antitank assault section, and fire from our 75mm recoilless weapons in position on the high ground on either side of the road. The tank was knocked out, and the second tank immediately came up and tried to go around it. The second, too, was hit in the track and skidded off the road. Our M-26 tanks finished him off [after a 2.36" white phosphorus rocket had ricocheted inside it, creating a fiery cauldron]. The third tank made the same mistake that the second tank made. He, too, tried to go around the other two tanks. One of our M-26 tanks hit this third tank with a direct hit. All three of these tanks were finished off by our M-26 tank platoon.

Back on the hills, the men of the 1st Battalion spent the midnight hours on the alert. The attacks that day had cost the brigade 205 casualties, and, to avoid the punishing Marine air strikes in daylight, the enemy was sure to counterattack during the darkness.

The Enemy Reaction

And it did. At 0230 a green signal flare soared into the sky, and the enemy hit—and hit hard. With their captured U.S. Army radio tuned to the Marines' frequency, the attackers knew the exact place where the two Marine companies were tenuously tied together, and they sought to drive a wedge in there and then envelop each company separately. With Company A only part way up Hill 117, machine gun fire from the crest and grenades rolling downhill covered the assault troops of the NKPA, as they ran down throwing more grenades and spraying submachine gun fire. A rifle platoon was in deep trouble, the mortar platoon was decimated, the Marine defense line was penetrated, the company was split in half, the battalion was assaulted, and the enemy forced Company A to make a partial withdrawal back to a spot near Hill 109.

Things were not much better in the Company B zone. With the two Marine companies split by the NKPA, the enemy assault smashed hard into Fenton's men. A platoon was overrun under the eerie light of mortar illuminating shells. The attackers charged into the CP, where hastily assembled stray Marines met them in bitter hand-to-hand combat. Possession of the two hard-won hills and, in fact, the outcome of the whole brigade attack hung in a delicate, trembling balance.

Just at that precarious moment, the phone rang in the CP of

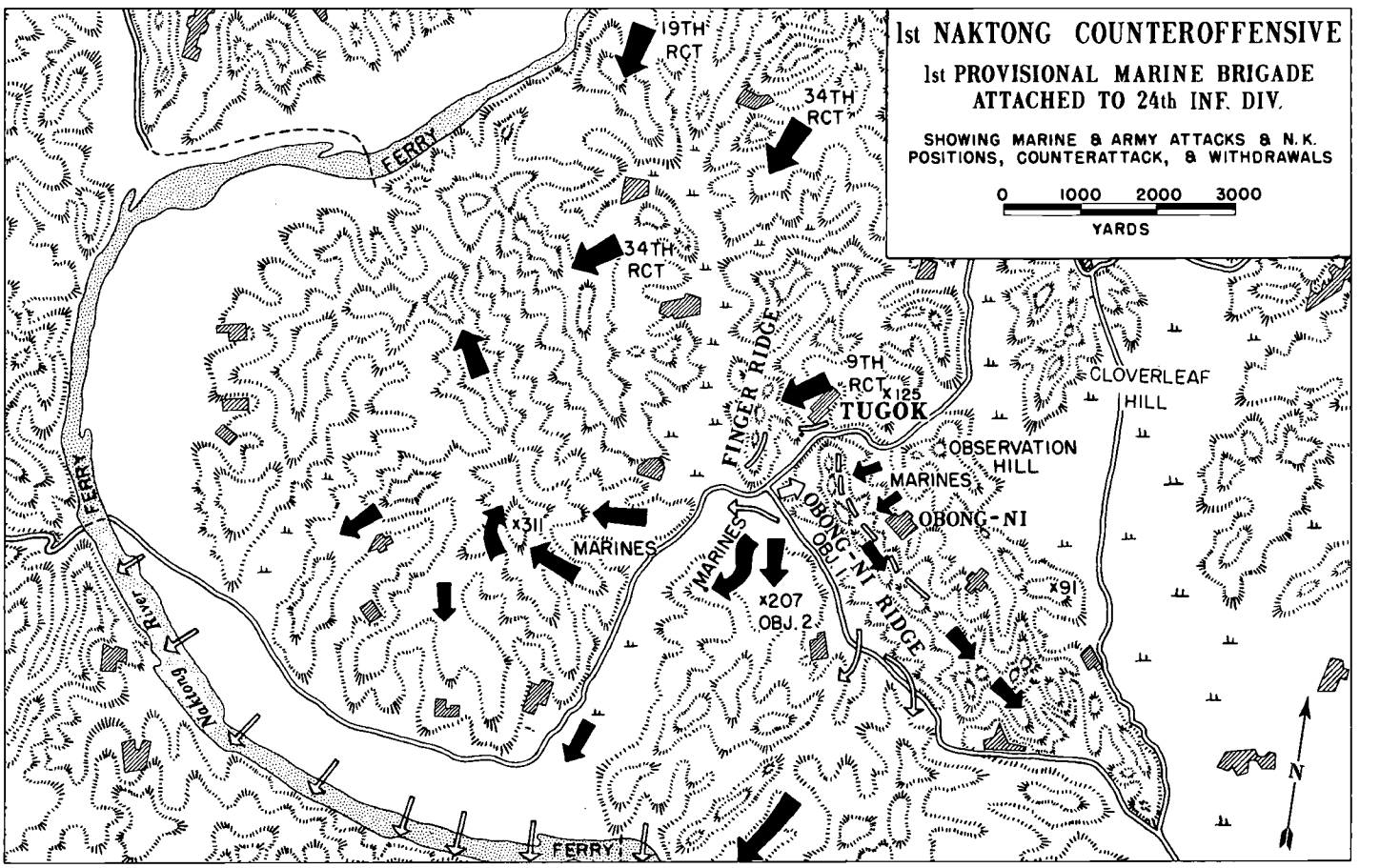
On top of Objective Number 3, Marines look down on the Naktong River.
National Archives Photo (USMC) 127-N-A1401

Company B. It was Newton, calling to say that the position must be held "at all costs," and that he was pouring in all the supporting mortar and artillery fire he could muster. (This apparently prevented the NKPA from feeding in reinforcements to exploit the breakthroughs.) Newton's main message was a brutally frank reminder that, if the Marines retreated, they would simply have to grind their way back to the lost positions in the forthcoming days. Then Newton asked if they could hold on until daylight could bring relief. Fenton's reply has been variously reported: "We have gooks all around us"; "They've turned my left flank"; "Don't worry, Colonel. The only Marines that will be leaving this ridge tonight will be dead ones."

The supporting fire from the 4.2-inch mortar company proved to be an invaluable asset. With its high angle of fire, it was able to search out and wreak havoc on NKPA units shielded in gullies which Marine artillery fire could not reach. The company's commanding officer, First Lieutenant Robert M. Lucy, later recalled:

> The 1st Battalion was receiving a terrifically heavy counterattack. Our company was zeroed in on the hill and the valley in front of the battalion. When notified of this attack, we began firing our prearranged barrages. Later, where only one of these barrages had fallen, they counted 120 dead North Koreans with 12 cart-mounted machine guns, who had been massed in this little gulley behind the hill, a ridge in front of the battalion that would have caused them considerable trouble.

With many officers down and aided by the supporting fire, the noncommissioned officers took the lead in regrouping their units, and so the men of the depleted Companies A and B stood, and fought, and died, and finally held their ground. Typical of the unyielding defense were the examples of two platoon leaders, Second Lieutenant Hugh C. Schryver, Jr., in Company B, and Second Lieutenant Francis W. Muetzel in Company A. Both officers, although severely wounded, continued to lead their men with the "fierce determination" described in their citations for awards of the Silver Star. Slowly, toward dawn on 18 August, the enemy attacks weakened. But the Marines had paid a fearful price. Company B had begun the night with 190 enlisted men and five officers; the next morning there were only 110 left, with one officer



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A-157140

With an enemy who was adept at infiltration and night attacks, Marines strung barbed wire whenever they had an opportunity.

still standing. Company A was in worse shape with just 90 men remaining from the 185 at the start of the night.

But the enemy had also paid a heavy price. The sequential attacks of the 2d and then the 1st Battalions and the dogged nighttime defense had caused hundreds of NKPA casualties so that, in Fehrenbach's words, "the *18th Regiment* was shattered beyond repair."

Craig ordered a resumption of the attack at 0700 the next morning, 18 August. None of the men on Obong-ni had had any sleep during the night past, but the Corsairs were back on station overhead, the enemy was weakening, and both Companies A and B moved once more into the assault. Company B worked men to its left to coordinate with Company A's effort to seize Hill 117. Four determined NKPA machine gunners there held up the advance, so the company commander, Captain John R. Stevens, got in touch with Newton to call in an air strike. There was legitimate concern about the fact that his Marines were too close, only 100 yards from the target, but a smoke rocket was fired into the emplacements from the control Corsair, and the next Corsair put a 500-pound bomb right onto the center of the target. The Marines lost one man killed, but the enemy was totally wiped out, and Company A's follow-up rush quickly took control of the crest. Time: 0734, request air strike; 0743, bomb delivered; 0748, on the crest.

There was a brief pause—well remembered by Muetzel:

> In an effort to calm the men after all they'd been through, I told them to break out rations and eat while they had a chance. I sat on the side of a hole and dangled my feet. On the other side of the hole lay a dead North Korean. He had caught one through the top of the head and looked pretty ugly. I was 23 years old and to reassure the men I tried to pull off a John Wayne stunt. When I was halfway through my can of meat and beans, decomposing gases caused the cadaver to belch. Black blood foamed out of its mouth and nose. I promptly lost my entire lunch. By the time the platoon got through laughing, the tension was broken and they were ready to go back to work.

And back to work the company went, moving aggressively to take the remaining hilltops. Resistance was minimal now, and soon all the heights of bloody Obong-ni Ridge were in Marine hands. As the men looked down the reverse slope of one of the hills, an unusual sight greeted their eyes. A clump of scrub pines lay below them, and, as they watched, astonished, the "clump" turned out to be a group of camouflaged enemy soldiers who arose and rushed downward in headlong flight.

The 1st Battalion now counted up the enemy weapons destroyed or abandoned: 18 heavy machine guns, 25 light machine guns, 63 submachine guns, 8 antitank rifles, 1 rocket launcher, and large stocks of ammunition and grenades.

The seizure of Obong-ni Ridge was crucial to the elimination of the threatening salient which had been driven into the Army's lines. As Geer summed it up, "it was evident the enemy had staked the defense of the Naktong Bulge on their ability to hold that key ridge."

Next: Objective 2

With Objective 1 now secured and the enemy in bad shape, Murray kept the pressure on. Taplett's 3d Battalion moved out that same morning of 18 August, bound for Objective 2, Hill 207 (the next rise west of Obong-ni). It was preceded by an intensive barrage from air, artillery, tanks, and mortars, including now supporting

National Archives Photo (USMC) 127-N-A2189

A "turkey shoot" ended the First Battle of the Naktong. Here a BAR man draws a bead on the fleeing enemy.

fire from the 9th Infantry on the right flank.

A correspondent in the rear was awed:

> The 155s began to roar and the snub-nosed 105s, and to one side the mortars were barking, and in front the squat tanks were slamming away with the 90mm guns whose muzzle blast can knock a man down at thirty feet, and above the hill, swooping low, the planes were diving in.
>
> You would see the smoke and fire flash of the rockets leaving the wings, and then would come the great tearing sound the rocket made in flight, and then the roar of its bursting against the hill. And after the rockets had gone, you would see the little round dots of smoke in the sky as the wing guns fired, and all the crest of the hill in front of How Company was a roaring, jumping hell of smoke and flame and dust and noise.

With this kind of preparation, "Objective 2 was not much of a fight," as an officer in Company G said. There was a grenade flurry near the crest of Hill 207, but a platoon of Company H was then able to rush the enemy positions, and it was all over by 1237.

There had been a tide of NKPA troops running for safety. Now it became a flood, increased by men driven from Hill 207. Everywhere the soldiers of the NKPA's "crack" *4th Division* on Obong-ni had themselves cracked and were fleeing westward in a disorganized, panic-stricken rout. It became a field day for the Marine artillery and planes—a thunderous hammering that caused massive waves of enemy deaths. There were "all kinds of bodies floating in the Naktong."

Final Victory: Objective 3

Taplett kept driving. Next target: "Objective 3," Hill 311, the last barrier before the Naktong River. There was another round of preparatory fire, this one featuring a dose of napalm, and one more time the riflemen moved out.

Things went fairly smoothly for Company G which, "brushing aside light resistance," was on the crest by 1730. Not so for Company H. It was badly hindered by difficult terrain and an obdurate enemy, and by 1825 was pinned down and unable to advance. Supporting fire from Company G and an attempted flanking maneuver by its Cahill platoon (which, 10 days earlier, had had that relief mission on Hill 342) were not

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A2238

BGen Edward A. Craig receives the thanks of South Korean President Syngman Rhee at the Purple Heart ceremony.

enough help for H to be able to advance.

It was the last gasp of the NKPA, however. A heavy round of battalion mortar fire early the next morning, 19 August, was followed by a triumphant sweep of the hilltop by Company H, and the Marine battle to seize the three key ridges in the Naktong Bulge was over. One battalion stood on each of the three objectives, and the men of the brigade met the Army troops at the river's edge. Marine aviators reported, "the enemy was killed in such numbers that the river was definitely discolored with blood."

During the attack on Objective 3, the 3d Battalion surgeon came across a horrendous sight, demonstrating the savage brutality of the NKPA. A U.S. Army aid station had been overrun a week earlier, the wounded and bed-ridden men shot and bayoneted, their bodies then mutilated. Medics who bravely had stayed there to tend their men had had the hands wired behind their backs and then were murdered.

An incident occurred on one of these final nights that is very revealing of how personnel problems could be expeditiously dealt with in the "Old Corps"—particularly in a combat environment. Bohn had told his machine gun platoon lieutenant to check carefully on the positioning and coordination of the weapons' sites. When the company commander decided to inspect personally, he found wholly unsatisfactory results and crews who had not even seen their lieutenant. Steaming, he returned to his CP and hauled the lieutenant in for a very brief conversation:

> I said, "Have you put in the machine gun sections? Did you get around to check each section?" He said, "Yes, sir." So I relieved him. I called Taplett and said, "I don't even want this guy here tonight." I made him go back on his own, back to the battalion, and wrote an unsat report, un-officer-like conduct.
>
> It went up to Craig, and the guy was out of country in two or three days. It was so easy to do things like that then. And he was out of the Marine Corps. You can't do that today. You have to have a General Court-martial and everything else. There wasn't even a Court of Inquiry. Everyone agreed that he was a coward, and he was gone.

The brigade was now relieved by Army units—not always smoothly, but at least the tired Marines would get some rest.

The victory price for the Naktong Marines was clear: 66 dead, 278 wounded, but only 1 man missing in action. That last figure was the clearest indication of the value of Marine training and morale; there had been other units with distressingly high percentages of missing-in-action, but, as Edwin P. Hoyt summarizes in his history, *The Pusan Perimeter—Korea 1950*: "The Marines stood and fought, and they took care of their own."

The final results for the NKPA *4th Division* were shattering. Fewer than 3,000 men were able to get back across the Naktong, leaving more than 1,200 dead behind. The Marine brigade recovered a large amount of enemy equipment, including 34 artillery pieces (with five of them being captured Army 105mm howitzers), hundreds of automatic weapons, and thousands of rifles. The Army's official history sums it up: "The destruction . . . of the NKPA *4th Division* . . . was the greatest setback suffered thus far by the North Korean Army. The

4th Division never recovered from this battle."

After the brigade was pulled back off the hills it had won, Fenton described what he felt was the key reason for the Marine victory: "the finest batch of noncommissioned officers ever assembled in any Marine regiment. Not only were 75 percent of them combat veterans, he believed, but they had often stepped in as platoon leaders and were "outstanding." Fenton expanded on that:

> Squad leaders knew their job to the last detail. Many times I ended up with sergeants as platoon leaders after a big fire fight, and they did an excellent job. I just can't be too high in my praise.
>
> In some cases, it wasn't just noncoms. It was the PFCs and privates holding the job of a fire team leader or squad leader. It was their fine leadership, outstanding initiative, and control of the men that turned a possible defeat into a sweet victory.

On 20 August Craig learned from Church that the brigade had been detached from the 24th Division and was now part of Walker's Eighth Army reserve. There were letters of praise from both Walker and Church. The former wrote that the brigade's "excellence in leadership and grit and determination . . . upheld the fine tradition of the Marines in a glorious manner." Church graciously commented to the Marines that their "decisive and valiant offensive actions . . . predominantly contributed to the total destruction of the Naktong pocket." Perhaps the recognition the men of the brigade appreciated most came from their own Commandant. General Cates' message said: "I am very proud of the performance of your air-ground team. Keep hitting them front, flanks, rear, and topside. Well done."

National Archives Photo (USMC) 127-N-A1469

A high point of the brief interlude in the rest area: mail call!

Another Brief Interlude

Thus the men of the brigade moved back into bivouac in an area near Masan known forever after as "The Bean Patch." Craig set up his CP there on 21 August and reported back again to Kean of the Army's 25th Division. The news was discouraging: all the land won in the brigade's drive to Sachon was now lost or under heavy enemy pressure, and the 11th Marines was needed to go back immediately to the original starting point two weeks earlier, Chindongni, to fire missions in support of the 25th Division.

But for the other Marines it was a wonderful, restorative change. Some 800 replacements arrived to fill in the painful gaps in the ranks; VMO-6 helicopters flew in hot food; letters from home and beer miraculously appeared; and new equipment was issued. But not enough of it. Fenton frankly noted that the equipment they had arrived with in the Bean Patch was in "terrible condition." It had deteriorated badly from exposure to heat, rain, and frequent immersion in rice paddies.

In addition, he commented:

> We were having a hard time getting Browning automatic rifles. Many of our BAR men had been casualties, and we were down to about three or four per platoon. You just couldn't get a BAR belt in Korea.
>
> Shoes were another big problem . . . . We reached the point where we had men running around in tennis shoes. Dungarees were in bad shape . . . . Our packs, which had been dropped at Pusan and were supposed to have been brought to us by the rear echelon, never arrived. The only way we could get a clean suit

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A1441

Commanders and staff of the 5th Marines assembled for a photograph during a lull in the battle, Pictured in the front row, from left, are: LtCol George R. Newton, LtCol Harold S. Roise, and LtCol Robert D. Taplett. Second row, LtCol Raymond L. Murray and LtCol Lawrence C. Hays, Jr. Third row, Maj R. M. Colland, LtCol George F. Walters, Jr., Capt John V. Huff, Maj Kenneth B. Boyd, Maj Harold Wallace, Maj William C. Esterline. Fourth row, Capt Ralph M. Sudnick, Lt Robert M. Lucy, Lt Almarion S. Bailey, Lt Leo R. Jillisky, Lt Alton C. Weed, Capt Gearl M. English, WO Harold J. Michael, and CWO Bill E. Parrish

of dungarees was to wash them or survey the supply at the laundry unit when we took a shower.

There were no shelter halves either, so the men slept out in the open. A memorable event was a ceremony for the award of 87 Purple Heart medals, with South Korean President Syngman Rhee in attendance. The attrition rate among the officers had been fearful: five of the six company commanders were wounded and nine of the 18 rifle platoon leaders were wounded and four of the killed in action.

One platoon leader, Second Lieutenant Muetzel, received two Purple Hearts (with a Silver Star Medal to come later for his heroic actions on Obong-ni), while the gunnery sergeant of the Reconnaissance Company, a veteran of World War II wounds, received his fifth Purple Heart. It was a strain to try to look presentable for the ceremony, as Muetzel later remarked:

My leggings had been thrown away, my trousers were out at both knees, my right boot had two bullet holes in it, and my dungaree jacket had corporal's stripes stenciled on the sleeves. I grabbed a fast shave with cold water, hard soap, and a dull blade. Gene Davis loaned me a clean set of dungarees, Tom Gibson loaned me his second lieutenant's bars, and off I went with my troops.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A1507

After the First Battle of the Naktong, there was a welcome moment to clean up—with a South Korean boy holding the mirror.

Future Plans

While the troops were enjoying this temporary lull, some of Craig's senior staff officers were sent to Tokyo to confer on plans for the future use of the Marines. MacArthur had made bold—very bold—plans for a daring end-run around the NKPA besieging the Pusan Perimeter by making a surprise amphibious landing far to the rear, at Inchon. For this purpose he had urgently requested the full 1st Marine Division. Elements of it began arriving in Japan on 28 August, but there were massive problems to be overcome. The 1st Marines was on hand, but the 7th Marines would not arrive at Inchon until a week after D-day, with one battalion coming halfway around the world from the Mediterranean. The crucial unit for the forthcoming assault was supposed to be the battled-tested 5th Marines. It had already begun shipping its heavy equipment back down to Pusan, as plans were drawn to have it join the 1st Marine Division, even though it was now fully committed in combat. Morale soared in the brigade as the men looked forward to fighting side-by-side with fellow Marines.

Meanwhile, in Tokyo there were very tense moments. Time was critically short to mount an operation as complex as an amphibious assault. There were vigorous differences of opinion in Army-Navy-Marine meetings as to when or even whether the brigade should join the 1st Marine Division. On one hand, the Eighth Army staff felt, as the official Marine history bluntly put it, "Army morale would be hurt by taking the brigade away at a critical moment." And Walker placed an "extremely excited" telephone call to MacArthur's headquarters in Tokyo, saying in effect, "If I lose the 5th Marine Regiment, I will not be responsible for the safety of the front!" Thus there was strong Army pressure to substitute an Army regiment for the 5th Marines at the Inchon landing.

On the other hand, Major General Oliver P. Smith, Commanding General of the 1st Marine Division, supported by the three Navy admirals most closely involved, was equally adamant that, for a tricky amphibious landing, he had to have the 5th Marines which was trained for just such an operation. There was a deadlock.

The NKPA Attacks Again

Then, amidst these planning meetings, harsh reality came crashing down to complicate further decisions on the use of the brigade. The NKPA, realizing that time was running out for it, launched a final, convulsive attack to eradicate the Pusan Perimeter. Some 98,000 men in 13 divisions hit five separate points on the perimeter. Walker faced a brutal series of simultaneous problems. Where should he commit his limited reserves—in particular his proven Marine brigade? The two thrusts closest to Pusan were one against the Army's 25th Division in the same area of the far southwest, and another against the Army's 2d Division in the west central

Photo by David Douglas Duncan

The price of victory: a jeep takes two wounded men back to an aid station.

(Naktong) area. A breakthrough to capture Pusan would mean total disaster. (Military analysts in later years would speculate that that might well have happened if General Kim Chaek had ordered only diversionary attacks at four of the points, massed overwhelming strength at one point, and crashed through there.)

The NKPA assigned the *2d, 4th, 9th*, and *10th Divisions* to destroy the U.S. 2d Infantry Division before Miryang and drive through to the vital Pusan-Taegu MSR by way of Yongsan. Smashing into that division on 1 September, the North Korean assault quickly made a 4,000-yard penetration. The commanding general of the 2d Division, Major General Lawrence B. Keiser, USA, saw his division sliced in half, with his companies cut off or totally overrun, his defensive lines hustled back almost to Yongsan, and enemy infiltration in his rear. Neither Keiser nor his three regimental commanders had ever led troops in battle, and now the NKPA had punched a hole six miles wide and eight miles deep into their division. Obong-ni Ridge, so dearly bought, was back in enemy hands.

Now Walker made up his mind: the new Naktong Bulge had returned as his priority threat. Blair's book pointed out the logical, but painful, next step: "Walker came to a difficult and drastic decision: Once again he would have to call on Eddie Craig's Marines for help. The decision was drastic both because of the humiliation it would again cause the Army, and because Craig's Marines were a vital element in the Inchon invasion plan."

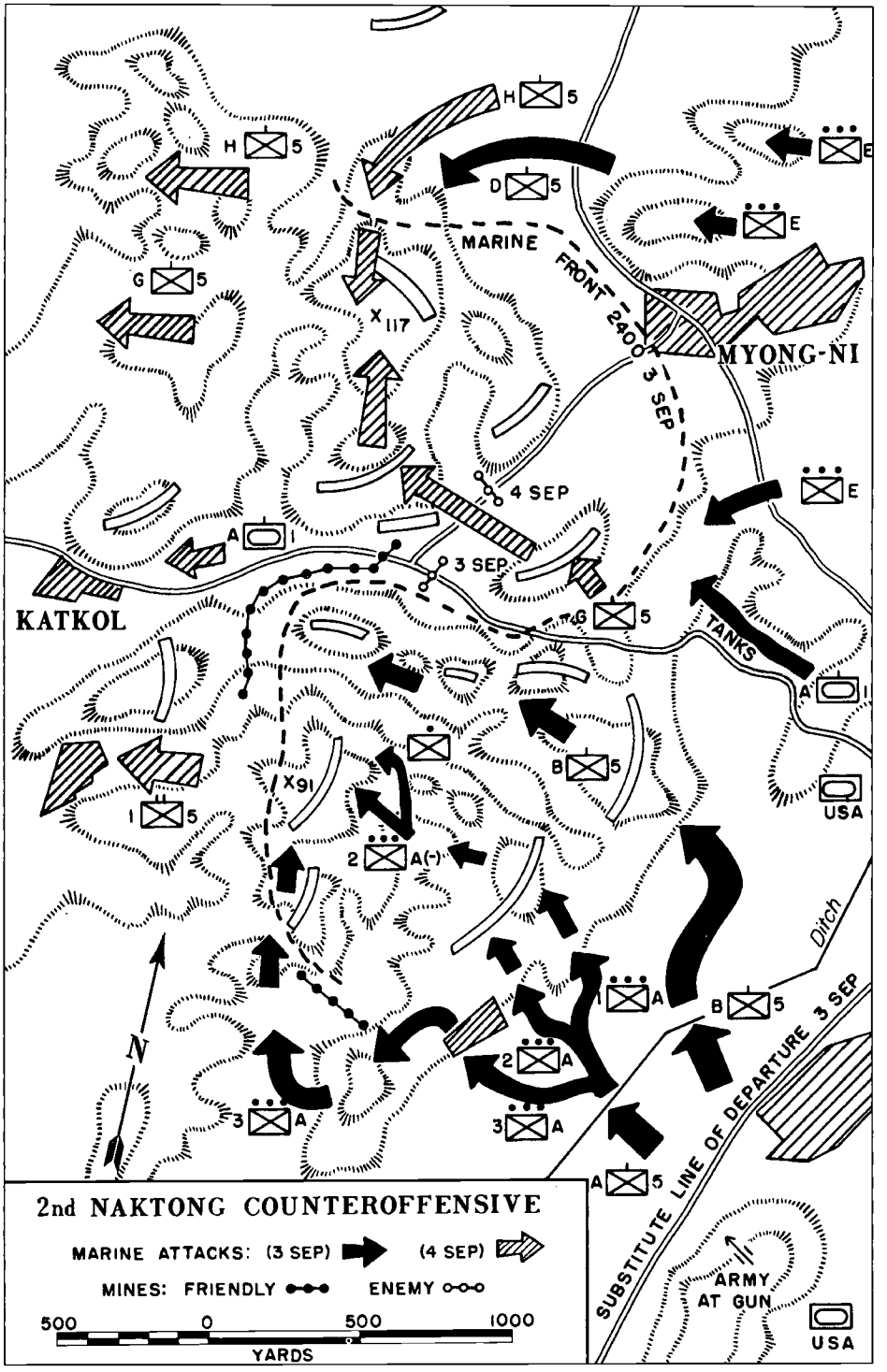
'Fire Brigade': Crisis Number Three

That was it. In the morning of 1 September, the orders came for the brigade, including the 11th Marines, to move by train and truck back once more to the Miryang assembly area. The reaction of the men was predictable: going back to regain what they had already won once.

When Craig had set up his CP in Miryang, his brigade came under the operational control of the Army's 2d Division. To old timers in the Marine Corps it surely brought back vivid and ironic memories of another time and place, when a Marine brigade had been teamed once before with the 9th and 23d Infantry as a proud part of the Army's superb 2d Division, 32 years earlier in France.

On 2 September, Craig had a conference with Keiser and the Eighth Army's Chief of Staff. General Shepherd later made a comment on this meeting which revealed the inherently gracious nature of Craig: "The Army division commander . . . went to Eddie, who was a brigadier, and said, 'General Craig, I'm horribly embarrassed that you have to do this. My men lost the ground that you took in a severe fight.' And Eddie, in his very gallant manner, said, 'General, it might have happened to me.' "

The Army officers at the meeting felt the situation was so desperate that the brigade should immediately be dribbled piecemeal into action, even though one of its battalions and its air control section had not yet arrived. Craig, who also knew when to make a stand, later remembered, "This was the only heated discussion I had in Korea with the Army." His stubborn view that the whole brigade should go into action as a unified air-ground team was finally accepted. Its attack would be down the Yongsan-Naktong road toward an all-too-familiar objective, Obong-ni Ridge. The 9th Infantry Regiment would be on its right, and other Army units on its left. Now the brigade, for the first time, appeared to have flanks that were secure enough to allow it to attack with two battalions abreast, Roise's 2d on the right and Newton's 1st



on the left. Taplett's 3d Battalion would block any enemy push along the southwest approaches to Yongsan.

Meanwhile, between 0300 and 0430, 3 September, the 2d Battalion moved into its forward assembly area north of Yongsan, with the 1st Battalion south of the town.

Opposite them, driving hard for Yongsan, were the NKPA divisions which had successfully advanced this far in the new Naktong Bulge. Immediately in front of the brigade was the *9th Division.* This was not a seasoned, professional outfit, such as the one the brigade had previously broken; rather, it had up to now been doing guard duty at Seoul. Behind it, in reserve, came a reconstituted *4th Division,* filled with new recruits after the massive casualties the brigade had inflicted on it in the first battle of the Naktong.

The Marines Attack

The Marine attack was to be launched early on the morning of 3 September. There were problems getting things started. Moving through Yongsan, the Marines were hit by small arms fire from snipers, but by 0630 they had worked their way to the western end of the town, and thought they were then headed forward to the agreed-upon line of departure for their main attack. Not so! During the night the Army troops on the ridgeline had "collapsed" and had been pushed back 1,000 yards. At 0645 Roise called Second Lieutenant Robert M. Winter to bring his tanks forward and lay down fire to cover the withdrawal of the Army troops. The original planned line of departure thus became the first objective when the Marines attacked.

The 2d Battalion jumped off at 0715, securing the right flank of the brigade's attack. To soften up his main objective, Roise called down a massive sheet of fire from tanks, air, mortars, artillery, and machine guns. The Marines pushed doggedly toward it wading through a rice paddy. Now the enemy's 9th Division quickly found its previous pattern of steady advances had ground to a screeching halt.

Craig, as was his wont, came up to check on the action. His observation post (OP) was between the tanks and Roise's OP. Enemy fire pounded the area, and Winter was wounded and had to be evacuated—but not before he offered Craig a bottle of whiskey from his tank. Winter was later awarded a Silver Star Medal for his leadership of his tank platoon that day.

Meanwhile, the 1st Battalion also moved out. Its attack route forced the men knee-deep into their own huge rice paddy. There they came under fire, but their supporting arms searched out the enemy positions. In particular, the Corsairs were able to engulf the NKPA with balls of napalm fire. A typical time of response was seven minutes from a strike request to execution.

This kind of seamless coordination in the Marine air-ground team was a source of great envy by the Army commanders who saw its decisive results. As Colonel Paul L. Freeman, USA, commander of the 23d Infantry (well off to the right of the brigade), wrote to General Matthew Ridgway in Washington:

> 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 off the left of that ridge in front of Item Company." They had it day and night . . . General, we just have to have air support like that, or we might as well disband the Infantry and join the Marines.

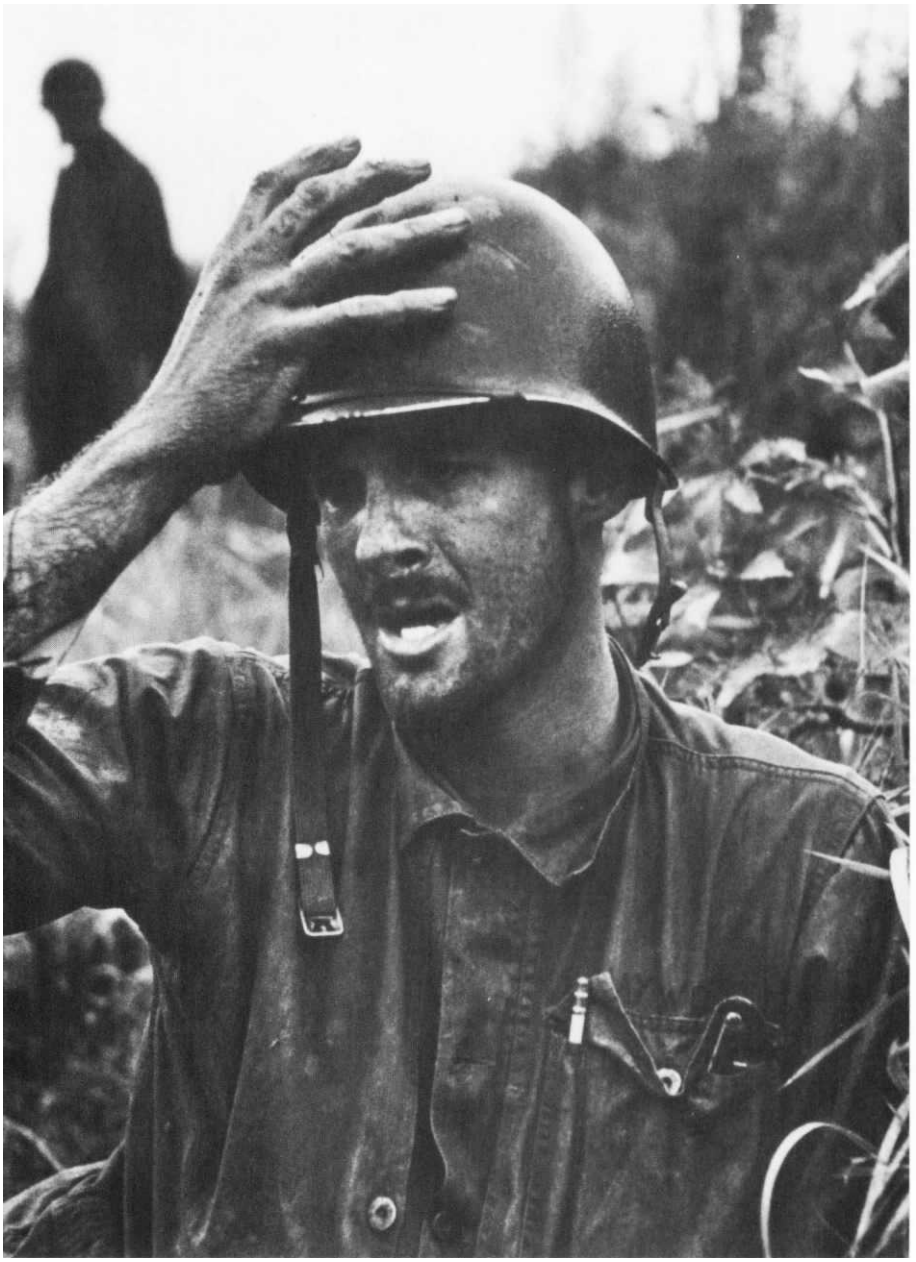


Photo by David Douglas Duncan

A distraught Cpl Leonard Hayworth pleads for more grenades, finds none, and must return empty-handed to his hard-pressed men.

By 1100 the 1st Battalion was at the base of its ridgeline objective. Working its way upwards under the protection of supporting 81mm mortar fire, Company A poised for a final charge. As soon as the fire lifted, the men sprang forward, screaming, shouting, firing every available weapon. To their amazement, a whole company of NKPA soldiers in front of them, shaken by the noise and the sight of charging Marines, leaped in a panic out of their concealed foxholes on the forward slope and fled back towards the crest of the hill. Then the long hours of practice on the rifle range really paid off: Marine marksmen coolly picked off most of the enemy as they ran. Company A immediately rushed to the crest. It was noon. In Company B, Fenton later observed:

> The 1st Battalion was able to move and seize the ridge line without encountering heavy opposition. I don't believe the enemy realized that we had a battalion to the left of the road, because he was prepared to take that high ground himself. We beat him there by a good 10 or 20 minutes and caught him coming across another rice paddy field. We really had a "turkey shoot."

Firing now from the heights, the Marine riflemen put on another display of precise marksmanship that must have stunned the simple

peasant soldiers of the NKPA: the "yellow leggings" could kill with aimed fire at 400-500 yards. (Just as the Marines in that earlier brigade in France had stunned the Germans at Belleau Wood with trained rifle fire that killed at long range.)

What the 1st Battalion did not finish off, the 105s of the 11th Marines did. Those of the enemy who were left withdrew to Hill 117 in front of the 2d Battalion, but an artillery barrage was called down on them in transit, and wreaked more havoc.

In the 2d Battalion zone of attack there were some hard moments. When Company D was getting started in its assault, a tragic episode occurred. (Today, it is called "friendly fire" and results in great publicity. Fifty years ago, in the early days of the Korean War, it was regarded as just one of those unfortunate things that happened because close combat is always unpredictable.) The official Marine history did not even mention it, but it was seared into the memory of Private First Class Douglas Koch in Company D:

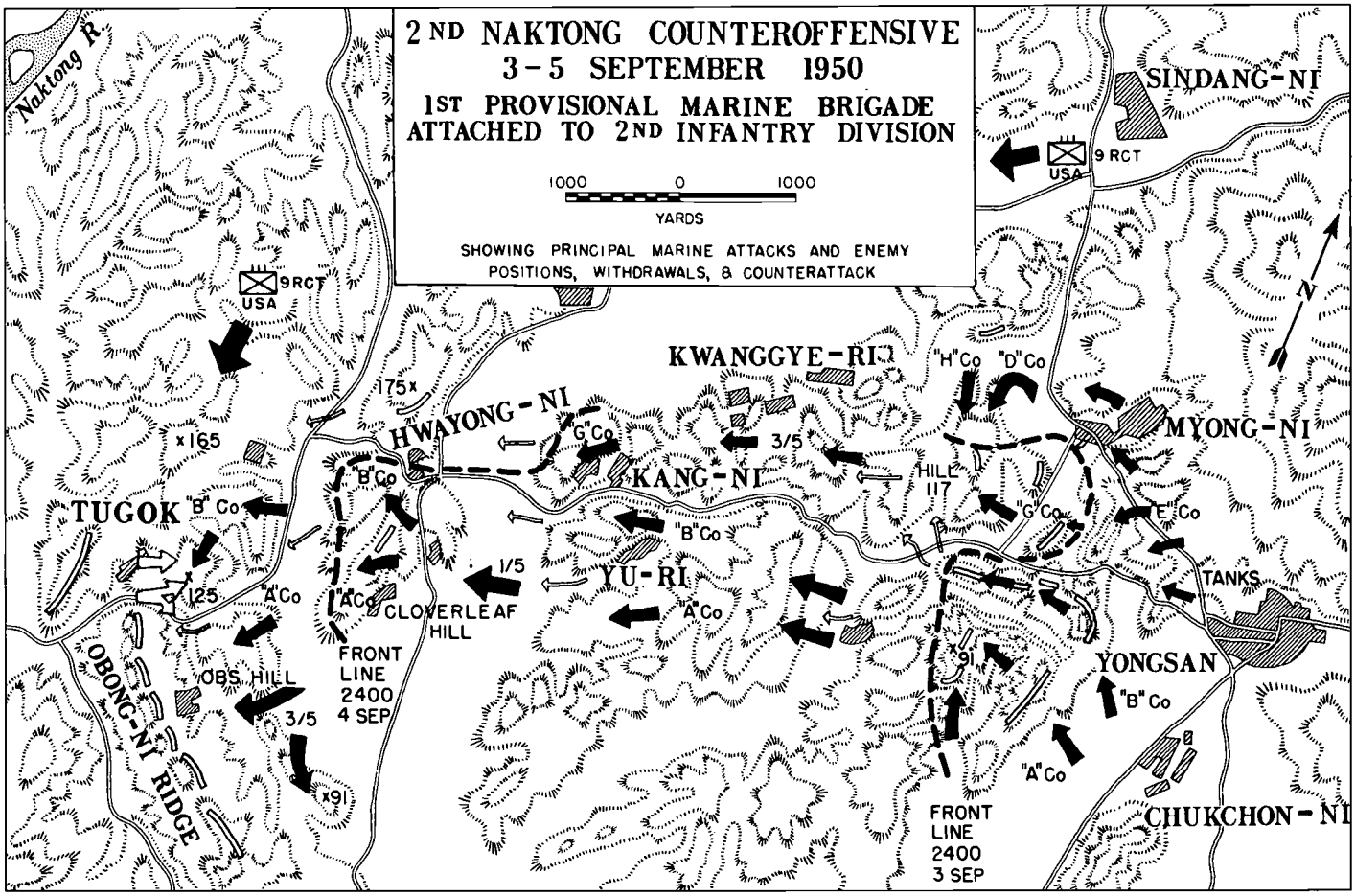
> Down the road from the north rolled four or five American tanks . . . . All of a sudden a machine gun stitched a stream of fire across the company's rear. I rolled over on one elbow and looked behind me. Someone yelled, "God, they're shooting at us." Instead of firing on the top of the hill, the tanks chose to fire at the bottom of the hill. I saw a puff of smoke. Just that quick a shell landed near me. It rolled me over into a little gully. I lay dazed. God, I thought, we're gonna get done in by our own goddamn outfit. While I lay with my head down, three or four more shells hit nearby . . . . A lot of men had been hit.

Naturally, this kind of ghastly mistake was temporarily shattering to the company, until the officers finally got their men moving again. But Koch and the others went back to their attack "still in shock."

This occurrence was, fortunately, a rarity. Elsewhere that morning of 3 September, Marine tanks were

Capt "Ike" Fenton, caught by surprise, described the grim moment: "We had been in one hell of a big battle. It was raining. The radio had gone out and we were low on ammunition."

Photo by David Douglas Duncan



doing yeoman's work. They took on NKPA antitank weapons, surprised three T-34 tanks and wiped them out, then eliminated two more in the afternoon. This clean-up enabled the M-26s to concentrate their fire to good effect on enemy weapons and troop positions confronting the riflemen.

Marine air was also very active. With the squadrons shuttling so that one was always on hand to help, seven close air support missions were flown for the two assault battalions. Other Marine planes, guided by OYs, strafed and bombed, knocking out, among other things, 16 enemy gun and mortar positions.

Back on the ground, Company D's first objective was Hill 116, to try to cut off the enemy reinforcements coming over from the 1st Battalion's zone. Facing two NKPA battalions, the company found itself in a bloody battle. It was finally able to gain the crest of the northern spur of Hill 117, and there it dug in, isolated, some 500 yards from the rest of the 2d Battalion.

As the enemy troops filtered into the zone of the 2d Battalion, the men of the 1st Battalion were able to make good progress in the afternoon, with Company B reaching its part of Objective 2, a peak across the MSR from Hill 117. Company A, using a fancy triple envelopment seized its part, Hill 91, by 1630, and so all hands prepared for the usual night counterattack. Well they might. The 1st Battalion's right flank was dangling in air; it was trying to cover a front of nearly a mile; and its two rifle companies were 200 yards apart. The 2d Battalion was in an equally dangerous position, stretched over a 2,000-yard front, bent in a right angle, with Company D completely isolated.

Three things saved the Marines' precarious position. First, a bevy of their engineers moved in to sow a belt of antipersonnel mines, wired hand grenades, and blocks of TNT along the flanks. Secondly, VMF(N)-513 came on station with its F4U-5N Corsair and F7F Tigercat night fighters. Equipped with sophisticated radar, it was the only squadron to fly single-engine planes over Korea at night. Flying more than 2,000 hours of night missions in one month, it delivered this particular night six close air support strikes controlled from the two infantry battalions. Thirdly, a deluge of rain, accompanied by icy winds, further hindered any plans the battered NKPA troops might have contemplated for a counterattack.

As the Marines waited though the miserable, rainy night, even though they had driven two victorious miles west of Yongsan, their

thoughts must have turned to the casualties of the past day: 34 killed and 157 wounded. Muetzel in the 1st Battalion later voiced what must have been a common sentiment after almost a month of grinding combat:

> [Men] came, were killed, and were carried away . . . . I knew this couldn't keep up . . . . We, me, all of us were eventually going to get it; it was just a matter of when and how bad . . . . It was just a god-awful mess—inadequate replacements, insufficient ammo, worn-out clothes and boots. No one much gave a rap about anything. Outside discipline was no longer a threat. What could the brass do to us that was worse than what we were doing? Each of us withdrew into our family—the squad, the platoon, the company, the regiment, the brigade, the Corps. Everyone else, bug off!

This same day, 3 September, witnessed a final showdown in the Tokyo planning meetings. A compromise solution to the deadlock emerged. Walker would get Army reinforcements and could temporarily use the Marine Brigade to meet his Naktong crisis. But it would have to be withdrawn by midnight 5 September to join the 1st Marine Division for the Inchon landing.

Continuing the Assault

Back with troops, in order to keep the pressure on the next morning (4 September), Murray had ordered Taplett's 3d Battalion to pass through the depleted 2d Battalion and resume the attack at 0800 with the 1st Battalion on its left. In 20 minutes, Taplett's men reached their first objective, then quickly took Hill 116 with almost no enemy resistance. Next, the battalion's main objective, Hill 117, was overrun by a pincer movement of Companies G and H. Incredibly, it was all over by 0840. No real enemy resistance had turned into a withdrawal, and now there were signs that was turning into a disorderly rout—a weird contrast to the bruising encounters the Marines had had the day before.

The 1st Battalion was simultaneously moving with equal rapidity. Shortly after starting, it occupied what appeared to have been a CP of the NKPA *9th Division.* Tents were still up, equipment was strewn around, and two abandoned T-34 tanks in perfect oper-

Marines meet almost no opposition as they top this hill in the Naktong River area on 4 September 1950

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A8175

ating condition were captured (the first such to be taken and turned over to U.S. Army Ordnance for examination). The men in the battalion's steady advance saw the bodies of many dead NKPA soldiers and piles of abandoned or destroyed equipment, souvenirs of low-flying Corsair strikes and accurate fire from the 11th Marines poured on the retreating enemy. Among the litter were captured American guns, tanks, mortars, and vehicles which were returned to the 2d Division. The official Marine history described "a picture of devastation unequaled even by the earlier defeat of the NKPA *4th Division.*" This time it was the *9th Division*'s turn to be hammered by the brigade.

By 1515 Newton's companies stood atop their first objectives, now less than 2,000 yards from the old killing ground on Obong-ni Ridge. Moving in coordinated tandem with them were Taplett's companies, which had pivoted to the west after seizing Hill 117.

Learning of the Marines' progress, Keiser gave Craig the go-ahead to have his brigade push on further toward Objective Two. Moving aggressively, using air strikes when held up, the 1st Battalion worked its way to the designated area (between Hill 125 and Observation Hill), securing Cloverleaf Hill by 1800.

Thus the brigade had advanced 3,000 yards and gained its objectives. Hoyt summarized the strategic importance of this: "The Marines had stopped the enemy's advance, saved Yongsan and the [MSR] road beyond [it], and put the North Korean *9th Division* into retreat."

As the Marine battalions dug in for the night they were in exposed positions similar to the preceding evening. Newton's men were 1,000 yards in front on the left, stretched paper-thin along a line almost a mile long. Taplett's men were no better off. Out of contact with the 1st Battalion on their left and the Army's 9th Infantry on their right, they curled up in a perimeter defense.

Expecting the usual NKPA night counterattack, the Marines again had their engineers put out a protective shell of mines, booby traps, and trip flares. There was heavy incoming shelling during the night, but that slacked off after a visit from the night fighter planes of VMF(N)-513. The rain poured down, but the enemy infantry apparently had been hit too hard during the day, and there was no assault.

When men are under heavy pressure in close combat little things can loom large in their minds. Fenton gave an example: "It had been raining all night, and the battalion had managed to get some hot coffee up to us, but just when the coffee arrived, we got the word to move out. We weren't able to distribute any of the coffee. This turn of events didn't do the morale any good. The men were soaking wet."

A more fundamental event took place that same night. Reluctantly following instructions from MacArthur, Walker issued an order that the Eighth Army would have to release all of its Marines at the end of the following day.

The Final Day

To finish off what the brigade had so successfully begun, Craig ordered both battalions to move out in a final attack the morning of 5 September. Before the 1st Battalion could get started, there was an unpleasant moment. Two U.S. Air Force F-51 fighters came screaming in over the Marines, strafing them. Miraculously, only one man was wounded.

The 3d Battalion started the day by showering a rain of fire from its high ground down on an NKPA attack on the 9th Infantry off to its right flank and rear. The 105s from the 11th Marines joined in, and the attack was shattered.

Now both battalions were ready to charge. And they did. The 1st Battalion jumped off at 0820 with the objective of capturing Hill 125 and Observation Hill, the brigade's segment of Phase Line Two. Obong-ni Ridge was then to be a special objective. Moving fast against light resistance, Newton had his men on his two target hills by 1100, and there Murray halted them until the 9th Infantry could come up to tie in on their right.

Meanwhile, the 3d Battalion was also moving ahead. Bohn had suggested that Company H, now commanded by Captain Patrick E. Wildman, serve as a base of fire to pin down the enemy, while he took Company G around the extreme left flank in an enveloping maneuver. "It worked beautifully," as he later reported, but then:

> As we were coming up, getting assembled . . . the North Koreans picked up on what we were doing. They had one of those old Russian [Maxim] wheeled machine guns, and I could see their officer. He was wheeling it up with his people. Jones saw him at the same time and he blew it up with the first round of 75 recoilless . . . . It was sheer luck.
>
> As soon as that happened, of course, we went smoking up, got over the top, and once we got to the top . . . we just rolled them up. It was outstanding.

So it was, that Company G was

in good shape on Hill 91, expecting to race ahead. Not so. Orders from Taplett at 1230 directed it to withdraw to Observation Hill and hold up there. The convergence of the 1st Battalion and the 9th Infantry had pinched out the 3d Battalion's area, so Company H joined in a sideslip behind the 1st Battalion to put the 3d Battalion on the left flank of the 1st, preparatory to a combined attack on Obong-ni Ridge. It, too, was told to stay in place; there would be a delay before any assault on Obong-ni.

With the heavy rain and ensuing fog Marine close air support was grounded, and this gave the NKPA an opportunity to launch a vicious daylight counterattack on the 1st Battalion. Company B, after an advance of 3,000 yards, was now located on a ridge line of Hill 125, parallel to and only 400 yards from Obong-ni. At 1420 an avalanche of enemy fire hit it. It was enfilade fire, mortars and machine guns, smothering both the reverse slope and the forward slope of the company's position. Fenton's comment was curt: "We were pinned down, and we couldn't move."

At 1430 the enemy infantry came on, some 300 strong. Fenton needed help, supporting fire and lots of it, but at this precise moment of peril all five of his radios, as well as the battalion's tactical radio, went dead in the downpour of rain. An enlisted runner, 22-year-old Private First Class William A. Wilson, was rushed off to the 9th Infantry, which had now come abreast on Company B's right flank. His message was urgent: "We need maximum supporting fire from your artillery, and we need it right now!" Meeting up with the adjacent Army company commander, Wilson was pointing out the target areas when the Army officer was struck down by machine gun fire and had to be evacuated. So the Marine coolly picked up his radio and directed the Army artillery fire to plaster Obong-ni and the adjoining enemy targets.

A runner had also been sent down to the MSR to warn the Marine tanks there that three NKPA T-34 tanks supporting the attack were coming towards them around

Marines assist wounded North Korean prisoners into jeep which took them to medical aid on 4 September 1950

the same bend that had been the scene of the previous tank battle two weeks earlier. The message was not in time. The lead enemy tank surprised the first Marine tank with its gun aimed left at Obong-ni. Several 85mm rounds knocked out the Marine tank. Its mate, trying to edge around the first tank, was also knocked out.

Then, out of the blue, a 3.5-inch rocket team, dispatched by Fenton, arrived at the carnage, soon joined by the battalion rocket team. In short order, they destroyed the first two enemy tanks, and then the third attacker, which turned out to be an armored personnel carrier. This made a total of eight steel hulks littering "The Bend."

While this dramatic tank confrontation was taking place, Fenton's infantry confrontation was also reaching a climax. He later described the tense situation:

> I found it necessary to place every man I had in the company on line. Rocket men, corpsmen, mortarmen, every available man went on line to stop this counterattack. To make matters worse, I began running low on ammunition. I was practically out of hand grenades, and things didn't look too rosy for us.
>
> Just at this time LtCol George Newton, my battalion commander, who had probably guessed my situation, sent a much-welcome platoon from A Company with five boxes of hand grenades. The enemy had closed so rapidly that we just took the hand grenades out of the case and tossed them to the men on the line. They would pull the pins and throw them. The enemy closed to less than 100 yards.

Adding to the intense pressure, the radios had not been functioning. Finally, at this crucial juncture, one radio was coaxed into service.

Marines examine two Soviet-made T-34 tanks destroyed by 3.5-inch rocket teams of the 1st Battalion 5th Marines, at "The Bend." The enemy tanks had supported the vicious North Korean daylight counterattack to blunt the battalion's assault on Obong-ni Ridge.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC)

Fenton quickly gave it to his forward observer for the 81mm mortars who called for immediate "fire for effect." When the mortars had finished deluging the NKPA attackers, there were only 18 rounds of ammunition left.

Duncan was with Company B during its wild battle and saw Master Sergeant Leonard R. Young positioning the men along the crest. (The later citation for a Silver Star described Young as "exposed to withering fire, [he] walked upright back and forth . . . placing men.") Then, Duncan wrote:

> He was shot. A machine gun bullet went right through his chest, knocking him into the mud. But not before he had given Ike Fenton the best that an old sergeant could give his company commander. He was still alive when they dragged him in across the slope.
>
> When they placed him upon a rough poncho-litter he looked up at Fenton, who stood with his hand touching the dripping canvas, and whispered, "God, I'm sorry Captain! I'm really sorry! But don't let them fall back! Please don't let them fall back." Fenton still had not said a word when the litter-bearers disappeared into the rain, and out of sight down the hill.

A crucial factor in the final, successful outcome of this struggle were reinforcements which came over from Company A: two platoons of riflemen, plus machine gunners, and mortarmen. Together with the combination of Army artillery fire and Marine 81mm mortar fire (which finally came within 50 yards of Company B), this broke the back of the NKPA attack, and secured the Marine positions.

Now, from their vantage point, the Marines could see the NKPA withdrawing from Obong-ni. It was an obvious signal that the enemy was thoroughly defeated, and the door was open for a quick and easy push all the way through to the Naktong River.

But the withdrawal deadline dictated by MacArthur had nearly arrived. All units were held up in position. The brigade counted up its casualties for that final day of battle, 5 September: 35 killed, 91 wounded, and, proudly, none missing in action.

At 1600 the battalion commanders all met with Murray to get the official word. Craig's directive was concise: "Commencing at 2400 5 September Brig moves by rail and motor to staging area Pusan for further operations against the enemy."

Relief and withdrawal at night from enemy contact is not as easy in practice as it is on paper. Hours after they were due, two Army lieutenants finally showed up to relieve the two companies of the 1st Battalion. Each had only a handful of men and very few weapons. As Muetzel recalled:

> An Army first lieutenant appeared with about 30 men who'd been scraped together from a headquarters unit . . . . I took the lieutenant to the very crest of the hill and had him dig in in a circle. He asked me to leave him our ammo for a 57mm recoilless rifle he had. Marines didn't have 57s, so he had a weapon and no ammo. He asked his sergeant to bring up their one machine gun. The sergeant told him it had been left back at the CP. I left behind about four cases of hand grenades.

So the battle-worn Marines slogged wearily through the mud and driving rain for three and a half miles to the rear. West of Yongsan, they finally boarded trucks, and by dawn 6 September they were on their way to Pusan, bone-tired but glad finally to leave those cruel hills of the Perimeter behind them.

Operational Results

As the truck riders' thoughts turned to their fellow Marines, they mourned the loss of good men and close friends. Those hills had cost the brigade 148 killed in action, 15 died of wounds, 9 missing in action (7 of these were later found to have been killed in action), and 730 wounded in action, for a casualty total of 902. Included in this total was a special category of men who had moved side by side with the Marines in combat, earning their undying admiration: the Navy corpsmen who had 22 casualties.

Looking back at what they had achieved in one short month, however, the men of the brigade could legitimately feel a sense of pride. They had traveled some 380 miles and mounted three difficult operations, each time facing and overwhelming heretofore successful enemy forces who had numerical superiority.

The initial brigade drive to Sachon had represented the first crisis in which a unit of the Eighth Army had been able to stop cold and then push back an enemy offensive: 26 miles in four days. Enemy casualties: 1,900.

The second crisis was a call for the "Fire Brigade" to stem the NKPA's dangerous breakthrough in the Naktong Bulge. There it literally destroyed the enemy's *4th Division*, with the Marine air and artillery arms contributing greatly to the slaughter. In addition, large

quantities of captured U.S. Army weapons were seized and returned. MacArthur spoke of the enemy division as "decisively defeated . . . suffering very heavy losses in both personnel and equipment."

In the third crisis, the Second Battle of the Naktong, the brigade had again been rushed in to meet the swift advance of the NKPA *9th* and (a reconstituted) *4th Divisions*. When its counterattack smashed the enemy units in a mere three days, in conjunction with important U.S. Army attacks, the official Army history quoted prisoners as saying that this was "one of the bloodiest and most terrifying debacles of the war for a North Korean division." As a result, "the 9th and 4th enemy divisions were not able to resume the offensive."

Over the period of that single month, the enemy had paid a devastating price, an estimated 9,900 total casualties, and massive losses of equipment at the hands of the Marines.

The achievements of the brigade went far beyond dramatic tactical victories in the Pusan Perimeter. It had demonstrated in its mobilization a remarkable ability to pull together and ship out a large Marine combat unit in a pressure-laden, short time frame (six days).

It had also demonstrated a variety of other lessons in Korea: the crucial efforts of previous combat training on noncommissioned officers and officers; the value of the intangible, psychological factor of Marine *esprit de corps*; and the dazzling effectiveness of a tightly integrated aviation component. Called "the best close air support in the history of the Marine Corps," the operational statistics of MAG-33 showed a total of 1,511 sorties flown by the three squadrons, with 995 missions being close air support not only for the brigade, but also for U.S. Army and South Korean units. In addition, the OY light planes and the Sikorsky HO3S helicopters of VMO-6 had tallied 318 and 580 flights respectively in just the month of August. Moreover, the helicopters' successful first combat role had proven the certainty of their large scale use in the years to come.

An evaluation of all these factors led the official Marine history to summarize the overall, operational results of the brigade: "A careful examination of any of these operations in which Marines engaged discloses that a single failure would have a profound effect upon the entire UN effort."

The individual unit commanders who had led the brigade in its battles had a more forceful conviction. They felt that they had "saved the beachhead."

From Pusan to Inchon

The final chapter in the story of the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade is one that is less dramatic than its battles, but one which illustrates its organizational flexibility and skill. Again, as at Camp Pendleton previously, it had too much to do in too little time. Arriving in Pusan on 7 September with over-tired men, worn-out equipment, and understrength from casualties, the brigade had to cope with a thousand details to get ready to move out in a very few days for its next demanding combat assignment.

Sleeping in the open on the docks, the men ate on board the transports upon which they soon would sail. (Although Craig and his officers later recalled the troops sleeping in the adjoining warehouses.) Bohn remembered the human side of this return to "civilization." The ship that had brought him and his men to Pusan was once again there at dockside. The Navy officers came ashore and invited Bohn and all his officers and men to come on board, and then welcomed them with "steaks, hot food" and "all the PX stuff" the Marines had not seen in a long time and badly needed now.

Bohn went on to describe another way that their deficiencies were remedied:

> I'm probably not being sufficiently critical of the Marine Corps supply system because, if it hadn't been for the Army, we'd have been in trouble. We stole everything, including jeeps . . . . We saw some rail cars on the siding. My Marines just went in there and looked. Whatever the hell they wanted, they took. The Army didn't seem to mind that. Stole beer, too. And it worked.

It worked to such a degree that all the jeep trailers in another battalion were emptied, then stacked full with beer on ice—perfect for the hot, humid, summer weather. First, a big party for its own men, then for the sailors on the ship upon which they would embark, the *Henrico*. Then, however, things sort of got out of hand. Muetzel saw a jeep driven by two Marines race by, closely pursued by two MPs. The jeep went off the end of the dock into the water.

Then two other Marines, who had climbed over the fence around the dock area, returned in impressive style. They were driving a huge Brockway bridge transporter which they had "acquired." They quickly abandoned it at the MP checkpoint—leaving it nicely plugging the entrance to the dock until a qualified driver was later found. Muetzel went on to say:

> While we were waiting to

National Archives Photo (USMC) 127-GR-A2193

After an all-night ride from the front lines, over-tired Marine mortar crews assemble at the Pusan docks and prepare to board a U.S. Navy transport. In a matter of days they would linkup with the 1st Marine Division for the upcoming assault on Inchon.

board the *Henrico*, we were required to turn in all the captured vehicles we were driving . . . . This left us unacceptably short of motor transportation. Consequently, vehicles were purloined from the Army. The worst offense I saw was the theft of the MP company commander's jeep. After a fast coat of green paint and phony numbers were slapped on, it was presented to Lieutenant Colonel George Newton, our battalion CO.

These shenanigans were, of course, only a counterpoint to the serious business at hand. To fill the gaps in the rifle unit, a large batch of replacements was on hand. These 1,135 officers and men would provide the manpower to give each battalion the third company which had been so sorely missed in the past battles. Now, for the first time in Korea, the 5th Marines reached full strength: 3,611 men. Although the fresh replacements' shiny new utility uniforms contrasted sharply with the bedraggled veterans, they soon fit in. Craig later commented that the new men "were integrated into the battalions without difficulty." Some of them were regular Marines and some were trained reservists, and Craig went on to say:

> Their [future] performance of duty was comparable in many ways, outside of, per-

haps, their weapons training and their tactical training in the field . . . . It speaks very well for the type of training and the adaptability of the Marines, both as individuals and as units, that such companies could be formed in the United States, join an active battalion just before landing, take part in that landing, and operate efficiently throughout the following campaigns.

In addition, a complete fourth regiment was attached to the brigade at this time. This was the 1st Korean Marine Regiment, 3,000 strong. The manpower was welcome, but there was just one problem. Craig explained: "These Korean Marines had never been issued arms, although they had been trained in their nomenclature and upkeep. They were, however, well drilled and had good discipline and spirit . . . arms were immediately issued."

For the brigade's well-used supporting arms, there was an intensive drive to clean up and service all the heavy equipment—tanks, trucks, and artillery pieces. For the infantry battalions, one critical need was new weapons. Many rifles, BARs, and particularly machine guns had been fired so much that the barrels were burned out, so replacements had to be issued.

Clothing was a disaster. Dungarees were rotted all the way through from rain and sweat, with the camouflage design faded out. Boots were "falling apart."

This kind of urgent need led Muetzel to strong measures. He badly wanted a new pair of boots, for the ones he wore had two bullet holes in the uppers and soles completely worn through. With none available from Marine supplies, he headed for the Eighth Army quartermaster. There he found a group of "scruffy" Marines being sharply told off for begging by an immaculate (rear echelon) Army major. The Marine group gave up and left, but Muetzel, looking like a "refugee" he admitted, persisted.

When the neatly-dressed major turned to go back to his office, Muetzel pushed into the building wearing his steel helmet, a dungaree jacket and pants with gaping holes, and tattered boots, and carrying a submachine gun and a .45 pistol on his hip. Now standing face to face, the major saw the lieutenant's bars on Muetzel's collar, glanced at his disreputable uniform, and started to say that he could not issue any boots. That did it! Muetzel burst out:

> I told him, simply, that I was just off the line, I was going right back onto the line, I was an infantry platoon leader, I didn't have a hell of a lot to lose, and I wanted a pair of boots right then and there! When he looked at my boots and noticed the bullet holes, he went right back into his stock and brought out a new pair of Army parachute jump boots . . . . I was ready to fight for those boots and that major knew it.

All during this time, the senior officers were involved in a different type of activity. They were closeted, preparing the after action reports, organizing the issue of supplies for re-equipment, thrashing out an embarkation plan, and familiarizing themselves with every planned detail that pertained to their unit's role in the forthcoming landing. Craig pushed them hard and soon—all too soon—the few days allotted had rushed by, and it was time to ship out. Starting the afternoon of 11 September, the troops began filing on board ship. The next day, the convoy sailed. Then, at 0001, 13 September, the brigade was deactivated and became part of the 1st Marine Division, bound for the historic amphibious assault at Inchon.

The brigade was now gone, but not forgotten. There was formal recognition of its achievements by two governments. The first was a Korean Presidential Unit Citation which recorded "outstanding and heroic performance of duty on the field of battle." Referring to the Naktong victories, the citation said: "The brigade attacked with such determination and skill as to earn the admiration of all . . . . The gallant Marine forces were instrumental in preventing the enemy from capturing their objective and cutting the north-south lines of communication. . . ."

The second award was a U.S. Presidential Unit Citation. This was a lengthy paean of praise for both the ground forces and the aviation units. It commended "extraordinary heroism in action . . . relentless determination . . . sheer resolution and esprit de corps . . . the brilliant record achieved. . . ." The award covered not only the brigade's ground units, but also MAG-33 and its squadrons.

They were fitting tributes to a special group of men who had truly earned a remarkable series of triumphs.

It would be a long war for the Marines in Korea, and there would be other much more famous battles to come, but the die was cast in those crucial first weeks of combat in August and September 1950. The Marine Corps had again decisively demonstrated that it was truly a "force in readiness," and that its rugged training and traditional *esprit de corps* could lead it to victory in "every clime and place."

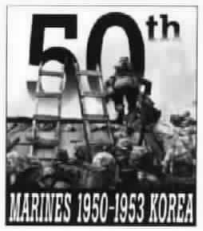
About the Author

Captain John C. Chapin earned a bachelor of arts degree with honors in history from Yale University in 1942 and was commissioned later that year. He served as a rifle-platoon leader in the 24th Marines, 4th Marine Division, and was wounded in action in World War II during assault landings on Roi-Namur and Saipan.

Transferred to duty at the Historical Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, he wrote the first official histories of the 4th and 5th Marine Divisions. Moving to Reserve status at the end of the war, he earned a master's degree in history at George Washington University with a thesis on "The Marine Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1922."

Now a captain in retired status, he served for many years, starting in 1983, as a volunteer at the Marine Corps Historical Center. During that time he wrote the history of Marine Fighter-Attack (VMFA) Squadron 115. With support from the Historical Center and the Marine Corps Historical Foundation, he then spent some years researching and interviewing for the writing of a new book, *Uncommon Men—The Sergeants Major of the Marine Corps.* This was published in 1992 by the White Mane Publishing Company.

As part of the Historical Center's series of pamphlets commemorating the 50th anniversary of World War II, Captain Chapin wrote accounts of Marine operations in the Marshall Islands, on Saipan and Bougainville, and Marine aviation in the Philippines.



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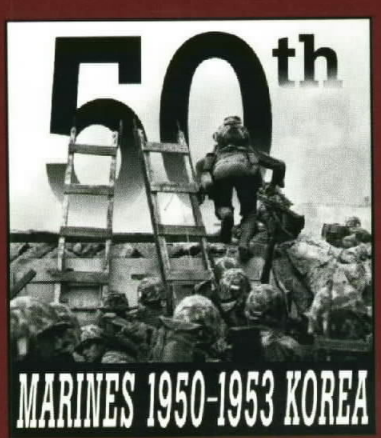
Personal interviews were helpful in meetings with: MajGen Robert D. Bohn, USMC (Ret); MajGen Charles D. Mize, USMC (Ret); and Col Robert D. Taplett, USMC (Ret).

Information also was contributed by MajGen Raymond L. Murray, USMC (Ret), and Col Francis I. Fenton, Jr., USMC (Ret), who kindly furnished postwar copies of *The Guidon*, a newsletter of B Company, with personal memoirs of combat.

The oral history transcripts at the Marine Corps Historical Center focus mainly on later events in Korea, but do have some observations by Craig, Murray, Bohn, Stewart, Sivert, Lucy, and LtCol Charles H. Brush, Jr., USMC, relating to the early days. In the Personal Papers Collection [now located at the Marine Corps University] there is a long memoir by PFC Herbert R. Luster who was a BAR-man in Company A (#1918-1A44). The files of the Reference Section contain much information pertinent to individual biographies and unit histories.
Acknowledgement also is made to Col David Douglas Duncan, USMCR (Ret), for the use of his dramatic images.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