

Drysdale, who now foresaw a more limited role for his men as the prospects for further raids diminished, revised the training of the Royal Marines with an increased emphasis on conventional warfare skills rather than commando-type operations. Hoping to rejoin the fighting, Drysdale initiated a request through Rear Admiral Arleigh C. Burke, USN, who was then Vice Admiral Joy's deputy

chief of staff, that the Royal Marines be attached to their American counterparts at the earliest possible moment. While it was too late to add the Commando to the landings at Wonsan, Admiral Burke sent the following message to General Smith: "British 41st Royal Marine Commandos available and anxious to join in your division earliest. Suggest this excellent unit be employed."

General Smith eagerly wanted the troops, although there was no reply for 10 days as General Almond, miffed at being bypassed in the chain-of-command, withheld final approval. Eventually, after the intervention of Admiral Burke and the British naval attaché, Commander John "Jock" M. D. Gray, RN, X Corps, gave grudging approval. Smith was anxious to employ Drysdale's Marines

Colonel Douglas B. Drysdale, RM

Colonel Douglas Burns Drysdale was born in Hampstead, a suburb of London, on 2 October 1916. He spent the majority of his youth in Argentina, where he developed a life-long passion for horsemanship, polo playing, and hunting.

Commissioned a subaltern in September 1935 in the Royal Marines, he was given charge of HMS *Renown's* Marine detachment. He remained on board the *Renown* during the first three years of World War II. During the occupation of Iceland, Lieutenant Drysdale served as the staff officer of "Force Fork," the combined force consisting of the 2d Battalion, Royal Marines, and a coastal battery. He was promoted to captain in June 1942 and assigned to the staff of the British Admiralty Delegation, Washington, D.C. Here, Captain Drysdale had his first contacts with U.S. Marines when he was attached to Headquarters United States Marine Corps as a liaison officer until 1943 when he became brigade major of 3 Special Service Brigade. He remained with the brigade for the rest of World War II.

In September 1945, during the Burma campaign, 3 Special Service Brigade was assigned to carry out Operation Zipper, an amphibious operation that was canceled when the war ended. Major Drysdale was to serve as the commanding officer of 44 Commando during that operation. For outstanding service in that theater, the British government appointed Drysdale a Member of the British Empire (MBE). After the war, Major Drysdale served on the staff of the British army staff college at Camberley. He then joined the staff of the Officer's School where he was promoted to acting lieutenant colonel and assigned to command 41 Independent Royal Marine Commando.

His command of 41 Commando in Korea was to be the highlight of a distinguished career. For his actions at the Chosin Reservoir, as well as his leadership of 41 Commando, Lieutenant Colonel Drysdale was awarded two Silver Stars and a Distinguished Service Order.

Lieutenant Colonel Drysdale led 41 Commando until



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late 1951, when he was relieved by Lieutenant Colonel Ferris N. Grant. He then served as the Royal Marine representative at the Marine Corps Schools, Quantico, Virginia, from 1952 to 1954. After leaving Quantico, Drysdale was appointed Commandant of the Royal Marine's Noncommissioned Officers School. He was then assigned to the staff of the Commandant General of Royal Marines, where he was promoted to colonel in June 1961. He was selected to command 3 Commando Brigade prior to his medical retirement in January 1962. He moved to Norfolk, England, in 1978; where he died on 22 June 1990 at the age of 73.

as a reconnaissance force in unison with the division's Reconnaissance Company to protect the division's flanks. On 16 November 1950, 41 Commando set sail from Yokosuka, Japan, on board the USS *President Jackson* (T-APA 18) to join the 1st Marine Division at Hungnam, North Korea. The Royal Marines and their American counterparts were about to participate in one of the fiercest and most memorable actions in their respective institutional histories.

Task Force Drysdale

On 20 November 1950, Drysdale's 41 Commando arrived at Hungnam and prepared to enter the lines alongside the 1st Marine Division at the Chosin Reservoir. After a brief period of cold-weather acclimation, the Commando joined the division as an attached unit. Its strength upon arrival was 14 officers and 221 enlisted. On 23 November, the division issued Operations Order 23-50, directing the Commando to "conduct operations to locate and destroy enemy forces in the Hagaru-ri, Samdae-pyong, Koto-ri area," coordinating its activities with the 1st and 7th Marines. Three days later, the order was modified to move the Commando to Yudam-ni to prepare for operations in the direction of Sinpo-ri (eight miles southwest of Yudam-ni) to protect the division's left flank in coordination with the 7th Marines. The latter order would never be carried out.

After enjoying Thanksgiving Day at Hungnam, 41 Commando moved out by truck on 28 November for Koto-ri, its stores including heavy weapons still in crates. Progress was slow as the convoy climbed the 4,000 feet to Funchilin Pass over the narrow, twisting road cut out of the rocky hillside. Arriving in late afternoon,

each troop was ordered to take up defensive positions on the perimeter and to dig in. Lieutenant Colonel Drysdale reported to Colonel Lewis B. "Chesty" Puller, the commanding officer of the 1st Marines, who informed Drysdale his unit would continue its journey on the morrow and that he would take command of a combat task force to open the road to Hagaru-ri.

Even before 41 Commando arrived at Koto-ri on the afternoon of the 28th, elements of the *79th* and *89th CCF Divisions* had slammed into the Marine's perimeter at Yudam-ni during the night of 27 November. Another enemy division, the *59th*, then completed an end sweep to the southeast and moved against the 14-mile stretch of road south to Hagaru-ri. Roadblocks were established between Yudam-ni and Hagaru-ri, and also between Hagaru-ri and Koto-ri. Bridges were blown along the route. The enemy now threatened the very lifeline of the 1st Marine Division. What was to have been an administrative move for 41 Commando now became a combat operation.

Augmented by U.S. Marine and Army units, Drysdale's force was to clear the enemy from the road and surrounding terrain between Koto-ri and Hagaru-ri, and then reinforce the Marines at Hagaru-ri. The force had three primary objectives to seize before the final goal could be achieved. With 41 Commando in the lead, the first objective was to seize the hill east of the road just outside Koto-ri. The second was to permit Captain Carl L. Sitter's Company G, 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, with Captain Charles L. Peckham's Company B, 31st Infantry (U.S. Army) following in reserve, to pass through and strike out against Hill 1236 further north. The third objective was to seize Hill 1182,

which was three miles north of Koto-ri on the east side of the road. These three units, together with the subsequent addition of 24 tanks equipped with 90mm guns from the division's 1st Tank Battalion, and five tanks from the Antitank Company attached to the 1st Marines, made up the fighting component of the task force. In addition to the combat portion of the force, there were detachments from Headquarters Battalion; 1st Signal Battalion; 7th Motor Transport Battalion; Service Company, 1st Tank Battalion; military police; and other groups and individuals from the 1st Marine Division. Also attached to this small but powerful force was a platoon from the U.S. Army's 377th Truck Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Alfred J. Catania, USA. Named Task Force Drysdale, the composite unit set about to break through enemy lines that had cut the main road leading to Hagaru-ri. "It will not be a walk in the sun," Drysdale said at the end of his pep talk to the Marines of Company G.

Fifty years before, U.S. Marines and Royal Marines had fought together during the infamous Boxer Rebellion of 1900. Now they prepared to do the same against, strangely, the same enemy, the Chinese.

At 0930 on the cold and snowy morning of 29 November, Task Force Drysdale set out from Koto-ri with a 800-man force, of which 235 were from 41 Commando, 205 from Company G, 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, 190 from Company B, 31st Infantry, and more than 150 service, headquarters, and miscellaneous troops. Trucks of the 7th Motor Transport Battalion supplied transportation for the Marines of Company G, while the Army's 377th Transportation Truck Company carried the soldiers of



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While waiting to join the 7th Marines at Yudam-ni where they would conduct reconnaissance patrols on the division's left flank, the Royal Marines were billeted for a few days with the 1st Engineer Battalion at Hambung. While there, they took over some of the night security duties.

Company B, and the vehicles of the 1st Tank Battalion's Service Company hauled 41 Commando.

As Drysdale's task force moved out, a massive artillery barrage began while Marine and Navy aircraft plastered enemy troop concentrations in the hills surrounding the road north of Koto-ri with fragmentary bombs and napalm. The Royal Marines seized the first objective with relative ease. But Captain Sitter's company met heavier resistance in its attempt to seize Hill 1236, about one-and-a-half miles north of Koto-ri. There, the defending Chinese forces had prepared elaborate defenses along the ridgeline. Fighting his way to the top of the summit, Master Sergeant Rocco A. Zullo maneuvered to within 200 yards and fired

several 3.5-inch rocket rounds into the entrenched Chinese forces, forcing them out of their positions where Sitter's Marines proceeded to decimate their ranks with small arms fire. The assault on Hill 1236 cost Sitter's company 14 casualties. The commandos and Company G then moved about a mile up the road toward Hill 1182, the third objective. There the enemy put up a stout defense with mortars and well-placed machine gun fire from fortified positions on the high ground. As Company G assaulted the Chinese positions, Lieutenant Colonel Drysdale ordered Captain Sitter to break off the attack, withdraw to the road below, and wait for new instructions. Prior to the move, Drysdale had received a message from Colonel Puller

advising him that tanks from Company D, 1st Tank Battalion, would be available at approximately 1300 that afternoon. Drysdale decided to wait for the additional support to minimize further casualties before setting out again. With less than two miles covered, the impetus of the attack was now stopped.

Two platoons of tanks from Company D, reinforced by the tank platoon of the Antitank Company from Regimental Combat Team 5, reached Koto-ri at noon after moving out from Majong-dong. Meanwhile, the tanks from Company B, 1st Tank Battalion, less the 2d Platoon, which was attached to 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, departed Tongjong-ni and arrived at Koto-ri

about 1500, too late to join Drysdale's renewed assault. The company was ordered to bring up Task Force Drysdale's rear.

At 1350, Drysdale's task force resumed its advance. Shortly after moving out, Captain Sitter's company encountered heavy small arms fire from houses along the right side of the road. Sitter quickly ordered the accompanying tanks forward to provide fire support for his men. The tanks opened up with their 90mm guns, flushing the Chinese from their fortified positions. The Marines then destroyed the enemy soldiers as they ran from the buildings. Thereafter, Communist forces repeatedly sought to delay the relief column with harassing fires. In one instance, enemy mortars and machine guns scored a direct hit on one of the trucks carrying Company G's 3d Platoon, wounding every man in the truck. Despite these and similar attacks, Task Force Drysdale continued to slowly snake its way along the road from Koto-ri to Hagaru-ri.

Further delays ensued while the tanks made their way around shell craters and roadblocks. For Task Force Drysdale, the advance consisted of brief periods of movement alternated with interludes in which everyone scrambled from the trucks to engage in firefights. Finally, about 1615 that afternoon, the column came to a complete halt about four miles north of Koto-ri.

In Hell Fire Valley

As the last tanks of Company B rumbled out of the Koto-ri perimeter to join the convoy, Drysdale questioned the wisdom of continuing the advance, given the road conditions and the tenacity of the Chinese forces opposing him. While concerned for the number

of casualties Drysdale had incurred in such a short advance, General Smith nonetheless believed it vital to relieve Hagaru-ri, and thus ordered the British officer to "push through if at all possible."

As his tanks refueled in a dry streambed, Drysdale's force received overhead fire support as air strikes from Marine Fighter Squadron 312, directed by forward air controller Captain Norman Vining, kept the Chinese from overwhelming his exposed position. Again more time was lost. Upon resuming the advance, unit integrity disappeared as the combat troops, who had dismounted from their vehicles to refuel, became intermingled with headquarters troops.

Not far south of the halfway point, increased enemy fire caused the column to come to an abrupt halt. The terrain was extremely foreboding and well suited for an ambush. The high ground rose sharply on the right side of the road and, bordered by the Changjin River and wooded hills, a frozen creek wound through a plain several hundred yards wide on the left. This valley was given the ominous name Hell Fire Valley by Drysdale. It was an appropriate name, as the Marines, soldiers, and commandos would discover when the enemy sprang a well-laid trap in what became an all-night fight by half the men of the convoy.

As the men of Task Force Drysdale piled out of the trucks to once again return fire against the well-trenched enemy, a mortar shell crashed into one of the trucks at the far end of the valley, creating a roadblock that split the column in two. Using small arms and mortar fire, the enemy took advantage of the confusion caused by the mortar fire and pinned down the troops who had scam-

bled for cover behind vehicles or in ditches along the roadside. Chinese fire prevented the disabled truck from being pushed out of the way, which in turn caused a major delay in the advance of the relief column. Nonetheless, the head of the column, which consisted of Company D, 1st Tanks, Company G, nearly three-fourths of 41 Commando, and a few Army infantrymen, continued its advance toward Hagaru-ri with Drysdale in command. Left behind were the remaining Royal Marines, most of Company B, 31st Infantry, and practically all of the division headquarters and support troops. Despite the confusion that ensued after the column had been cut off from the forward elements of the task force, the remaining troops quickly established a defensive perimeter "before it was too late." As U.S. Marine Sergeant Charles Dickerson later recalled:

Two thirds of the column was cut off, the first third going on up the road further. The road ran in sort of an "S" shape, not extreme, and at the left there was a small ditch. At the right there was quite a large ditch, and at the right of that was a railroad track, then another ditch. And further to the right was a plateau 20 feet higher than the road. Then there were rice paddies on further about 100 to 200 yards, and there was a river; and on the other side of the river was the mountain. The Chinese came from the front between the hill and this plateau. They came down the ditch from the far side of the railroad track and over the road at the front of the column. They came to the rear out of the valley and across a culvert.

On the left rear, they came down the mountain to the culvert and the rice paddy area.

Lieutenant Colonel Arthur A. Chidester, the assistant division logistics officer and the senior Marine officer caught in the cut off column, ordered the vehicles unable to proceed to turn around and head back to Koto-ri. Before his orders could be carried out, a Chinese attack severed this convoy about 200 yards to the north of him. Other enemy attacks cut the road to the south. In the ensuing attack, Chidester was wounded and eventually captured as the Chinese troops poured fire into the exposed Marine column.

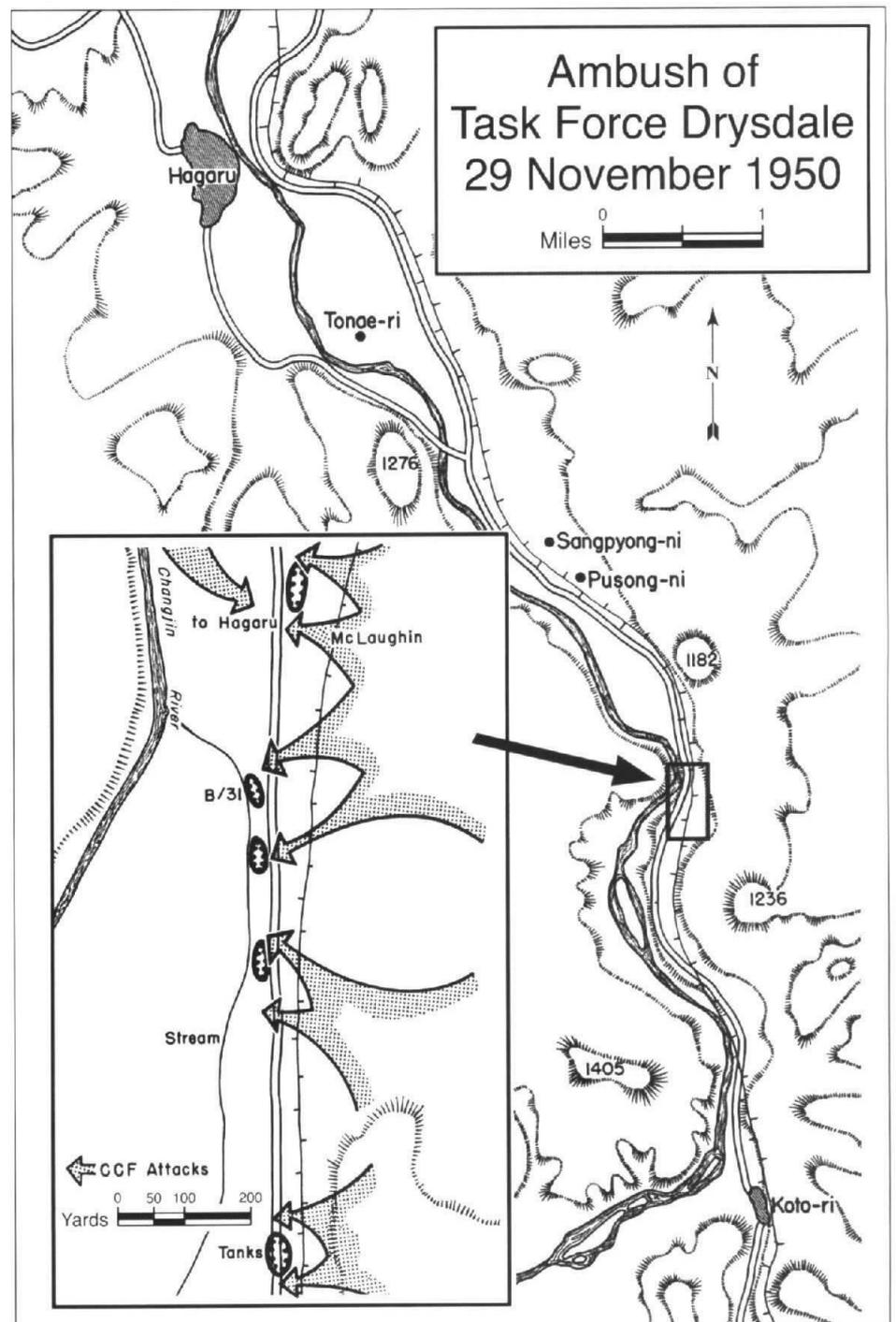
One of the problems encountered by the task force as it marched through Hell Fire Valley was the lack of communications. As X Corps' assistant operations officer, Major John N. McLaughlin, recalled: "There were really no internal communications in the column. Drysdale had no communication with the Marine company or the Army company or the tank company. And the tanks were told to move out and continue to move." Despite the lack of internal communications with his attached units and external communications with higher headquarters and circling aircraft, Drysdale planned to continue moving forward, fighting all the way if necessary, to reach Hagaru-ri.

While portions of Task Force Drysdale moved forward and Chidester's Marines fought off the attacking enemy, the commandos and soldiers left in Hell Fire Valley, with the assistance of Marine air strikes, continued to fend off probing attacks by the Chinese, whose onslaughts began to subside as darkness set in. With the arrival of sunset, however, the commandos,

Marines, and soldiers of the 31st Infantry waited for the inevitable Chinese night assaults.

Strengthening their positions, the commandos and soldiers established three defensive perimeters over a distance of 1,200 yards from north to south. The northern end of the defensive perimeter was centered on the village of Pusdong-ni and was the largest of the three positions. Led by Major McLaughlin, it contained a

hodgepodge of troops caught north of the second fracture in Task Force Drysdale's lines. McLaughlin's group comprised approximately 130 to 140 men and included the soldiers from the 31st Infantry, commanded by Captain Charles Peckham, Chief Warrant Officer Loyd V. Dirst and a group of U.S. Marine military policemen, some Royal Marines, various U.S. Marine service and headquarters personnel, and Associated Press



photographer Frank Noel. McLaughlin said his immediate concern was to organize a defense to prevent a Chinese breakthrough to the main column.

As Chinese soldiers resumed their attack on the night of 29 November, the Marines, soldiers, and commandos put up a spirited defense. McLaughlin said the fighting lasted all night "till about 5 o'clock in the morning when we'd run out of ammunition." Despite the hopelessness of their situation, McLaughlin's group bought Drysdale's main force precious time. What saved the other elements of Task Force Drysdale that followed behind McLaughlin's force was the quick thinking of McLaughlin and Chief Warrant Officer Dirst, the other Marine officer present. This made all the difference that night, as Technical Sergeant Charles L. Harrison recalled:

Well, at the start, just after we were pinned down, it was rather confused. It was quite mixture and a jumble of troops. There were British, U.S. Army, and Marines. As far as I know, there weren't over forty or fifty Marines; but as we were pinned down and the fire got pretty intense, and everybody bailed out of their trucks, there was a certain amount of confusion. Now, I'm speaking about the particular area I was in. I think the organization of the whole outfit into a fighting team could be accredited to Marine officers—Major McLaughlin and Warrant Officer Dirst—that is from my own viewpoint. There may have been others, but I thought that Warrant Officer Dirst and Major McLaughlin were a very good steadying factor.

They calmed the troops down and ordered them to the proper places where they could give the most firepower. During the entire fight, they both exposed themselves; walking up and down that road directing the fire and moving troops from one point to another. Warrant Officer Dirst was seriously wounded during the fight there—it must have been about three-thirty in the morning, I suppose. There was heavy fire from both sides all night; casualties were high on both sides; there were several attempted rushes by the enemy—and that's just about the size of it. It went on that way until almost dawn when our ammunition was practically gone, and then the negotiations for surrender came through.

As for the performance of the commandos trapped with McLaughlin's force, the U.S. Marines that served with them had nothing but praise for their fighting abilities. Sergeant Dickerson said the British Marines "did their job very well. On the night of our capture, they fought just as well as any of the other men, and it was good to have them around." Sergeant Morris L. Estess added that despite some problems in communications procedures between the units, everything went smoothly.

By dawn on the morning of 30 November, the situation had deteriorated as the Chinese pressed their attacks against the remnants of McLaughlin's cut-off force. McLaughlin called a meeting of his surviving officers and staff non-commissioned officers to discuss the remaining options. As Sergeant Harrison recalled, there had been

an earlier attempt to break through enemy lines to gather more ammunition, although it became apparent to all that the situation was, indeed, desperate. Turned back by a Chinese roadblock, the two Marines sent to get ammunition brought back surrender terms instead, which had been issued by a Chinese officer. Major McLaughlin countered with a few of his own terms, as Sergeant Harrison later remembered:

The Major [McLaughlin] circulated amongst all of us and asked us how we felt about it. We were practically out of ammunition and casualties had been very high, and it looked pretty evident that we'd be completely annihilated when daylight came. I firmly believe that we would have. Well, the majority of the men, I believe, wanted to surrender. They thought that was about the only thing left. And so, the Major himself went back this time to the Chinese, but he didn't agree to just unconditional surrender. He told them that we would stay and fight unless they agreed to take care of our wounded—that is, give them medical attention and return them to the nearest American CP. They agreed to do this. And then the Major came back and gave us the word that we were going to surrender.

During the ensuing negotiations with the Chinese, McLaughlin, accompanied by a Royal Marine, delayed the actual surrender to allow more men to either slip out of the perimeter undetected or for a relief force to batter its way through. His prolonged negotiations allowed more men to steal



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In the breakout from Hagaru-ri to Koto-ri, Marines pass Valley, the site of the ambush of Task Force Drysdale's column on 29 November. destroyed and abandoned equipment that littered Hell Fire

away while the enemy relaxed its vigilance. The largest of these groups came from the survivors of the three defensive perimeters established earlier on the afternoon of the 29th. They included soldiers from the 31st Infantry, U.S. Marines, and British Commando. Those unable to escape included 26 members of 41 Commando, who were taken prisoner.

As McLaughlin's men delayed the attacking Chinese, the remnants of Lieutenant Colonel Drysdale's column continued to fight its way through what Captain Sitter later estimated to be a regiment attached to the *60th CCF Division*. Due to the heavy enemy attacks, Drysdale was unaware the Chinese had cut off a major portion

of the convoy since there had always been gaps during the repeated stops and starts. He assumed the remainder of the column was not far behind the main body.

With the M-26 Pershing tanks of Company D and Antitank Company leading the way, Sitter and the rest of Company G, about a quarter of 41 Commando and elements of Company B, 31st Infantry, continued to blast their way toward Hagaru-ri under slackening enemy fire. A little more than a mile south of Hagaru-ri, the Chinese once again engaged the column with grenades and intense small arms and mortar fire from both sides of the road. In the battle that ensued, a satchel charge wounded Drysdale, who had

remained in the thick of the fighting. Sitter immediately took command of the force, reorganized it into a more defensible formation, and ordered the Marines, soldiers, and commandos to resume the advance.

As Task Force Drysdale advanced toward Hagaru-ri, which was now in view, the Chinese continued their attacks. In one of the last of these attacks, the assaulting enemy forces destroyed two trucks and inflicted several more casualties before the formation safely entered Hagaru-ri's defensive perimeter. At 1915, Sitter reported to Lieutenant Colonel Thomas L. Ridge, his commanding officer, who directed that Company G and 41 Commando spend the night in perimeter reserve. Although

severely wounded, Drysdale also walked into the command tent and, after rendering a smart salute, reported to Ridge that "all Marines were present and accounted for."

Out of a force of 235 Royal Marine commandos that reported to Korea on 20 November 1950, there were initially no more than 63 present, although an additional force of 55 commandos that had been cut off in the rear along the route into Hell Fire Valley later entered Hagaru-ri in the early morning hours of 30 November. Led by Corporal Ernest Cruse of the Commando's heavy weapons group, the separated Royal Marines successfully fought their way through a host of Chinese soldiers to rejoin Drysdale's force. Another portion of the group, commanded by Lieutenant Peter R. Thomas, arrived later at Hagaru-ri with a 2 1/2 ton truck loaded with U.S. Marines, soldiers, and wounded commandos. Of the 900 men and 29 tanks attached to Task Force Drysdale that had set out from Koto-ri on the morning of 29 November, only about 400 troops and 16 tanks arrived at their objective the next morning. As for most of the troops, tanks, and trucks, in the rear of the column that had been cut off, they made it back to Koto-ri where they took part in that position's defense. Half of the task force's vehicles were destroyed by Chinese fire and littered the road from Koto-ri to Hagaru-ri.

The Royal Marines suffered 18 killed or missing and 43 wounded. Included among the dead were B troop commander Captain M. C. Parkinson-Cumine, medical officer/surgeon Lieutenant Douglas A. Knock, RN, and Petty Officer John A. Tate, RN, section commander of the fleet volunteers. Captain Leslie G. Marsh, D Troop commander, and the intelligence signals officer,

Lieutenant D. L. Goodchild, were both seriously wounded. Less than 100 of the original force of commandos made to Hagaru-ri without becoming a casualty. For 41 Commando, this was the end of the line as major land operations were concerned, as their ranks had been decimated in the drive to Hagaru-ri.

Despite the casualties, the arrival of additional combat troops at Hagaru-ri "represented a tremendous reinforcement" for the trapped U.S. Marines. General Smith was even more blunt in his comments:

The casualties of Task Force Drysdale were heavy, but by its partial success the Task Force made a significant contribution to the holding of Hagaru, which was vital to the Division. To the slender infantry garrison of Hagaru were added a tank company of about 100 men and some seasoned infantrymen. The approximately 300 troops, which returned to Koto-ri, participated thereafter in the defense of that perimeter.

The next day, Lieutenant Colonel Ridge ordered Company G to retake the crest of East Hill, holding the remaining members of 41 Commando in reserve. Drysdale and his officers spent much of 30 November reconnoitering possible counterattack routes and devising a defensive fire plan. The company-sized force of Royal Marines gave Ridge a potent, highly maneuverable element he could use in the defense of Hagaru-ri. When elements of the *20th CCF Army* bent back the flanks of Company G on East Hill, one platoon of B Troop, consisting of 32 Royal Marines and commanded by Lieutenant Gerald F. D.

Roberts, was sent out to counterattack. After a furious small arms firefight, the commandos dislodged the Chinese forces and eventually secured the flank. Captain Sitter earned the Congressional Medal of Honor during this engagement for his inspirational leadership and tactical abilities in repulsing the attacking Chinese forces. As his citation noted, Sitter, "at great risk to his own safety, visited every foxhole and gun position of Company G and its reinforcements, this despite the fact that he had been severely wounded in the face, arms, and chest by grenade fragments." Despite repeated attempts to evacuate him, Sitter insisted on remaining with his men throughout the night of 30 November.

While the rest of the Royal Marines remained in reserve, the attacking Chinese continued to harass the British and U.S. Marines on East Hill with sniper and small arms fire. The Marines replied with a heavy volume of return fire that soon silenced the enemy. Lost ground was eventually regained, and when Marine air came on station at 0900, the situation was under control. Sitter's skillful defense throughout 36 hours of continuous action assisted in temporarily breaking the back of the Chinese attacks around Hagaru-ri. The Chinese again attempted to seize the hill in the first week of December, but were beaten back in a major defeat.

A Fighting Withdrawal and Reorganization

In reaction to the massive Chinese intervention, U.N. forces now faced what General MacArthur told Washington was "an entirely new war. Our present strength of force is not sufficient to meet this undeclared war by the

Chinese.” With the move to the defensive, General Smith’s only option was to fight his way out. The 5th and 7th Marines, then at Yudam-ni, were ordered south to Hagaru-ri.

It was cold and the wind was vicious on the morning of 6 December as the units at Hagaru-ri prepared to breakout southward. The 7th Marines took the lead, followed by the 5th Marines, with 41 Command and 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, attached. Before moving out on 7 December, Lieutenant Colonel Drysdale ordered a unit inspection. The officers moved up and down the rigid lines and reprimanded the men whose appearance and gear were not in the best possible shape. As Lieutenant Thomas later noted: “The Royal Marines custom of shaving daily despite the freezing weather had

been greeted initially with derision, but eventually the USMC conceded there was something in such outward signs of self discipline.”

The road was jammed with trucks, jeeps, and tanks; destroyed vehicles and battle debris were everywhere. The fighting intensified throughout the withdrawal, and as always, the Commandos put forth a valiant effort. Enroute, they retrieved the bodies of their slain comrades killed during the fighting in Hell Fire Valley, all of whom were buried in a mass grave at Koto-ri on 8 December. They were reunited along the way with Captain Patrick J. Ovens, 41 Commando’s assault engineer, who, along with 25 commandos attached to headquarters section, had managed to slip away during the surrender negotiations.

Despite repeated attacks from elements of an estimated seven Chinese divisions, it took the U.S. Marines, U.S. Army, and British Commando only 38 hours to move 10,000 troops and more than 1,000 vehicles the 10 miles to Koto-ri. There, General Smith assigned the Commando the task of holding the high ground overlooking the main supply route during the night to guard against infiltration by Chinese troops. On 9 December, in preparation for the withdrawal of the 1st Marines, the Commando relieved elements of the 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, on the Koto-ri perimeter. After beating back further CCF attacks, the Commando, along with the remaining elements of the division, set out for Hungnam, which they reached after marching another 23 miles in sub-zero

U.S. and British Marines move down the mountain road from Koto-ri to Chinbung-ni, impeded only by icy conditions and small enemy groups who attempted to block the road by fire from both flanks.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A5409

