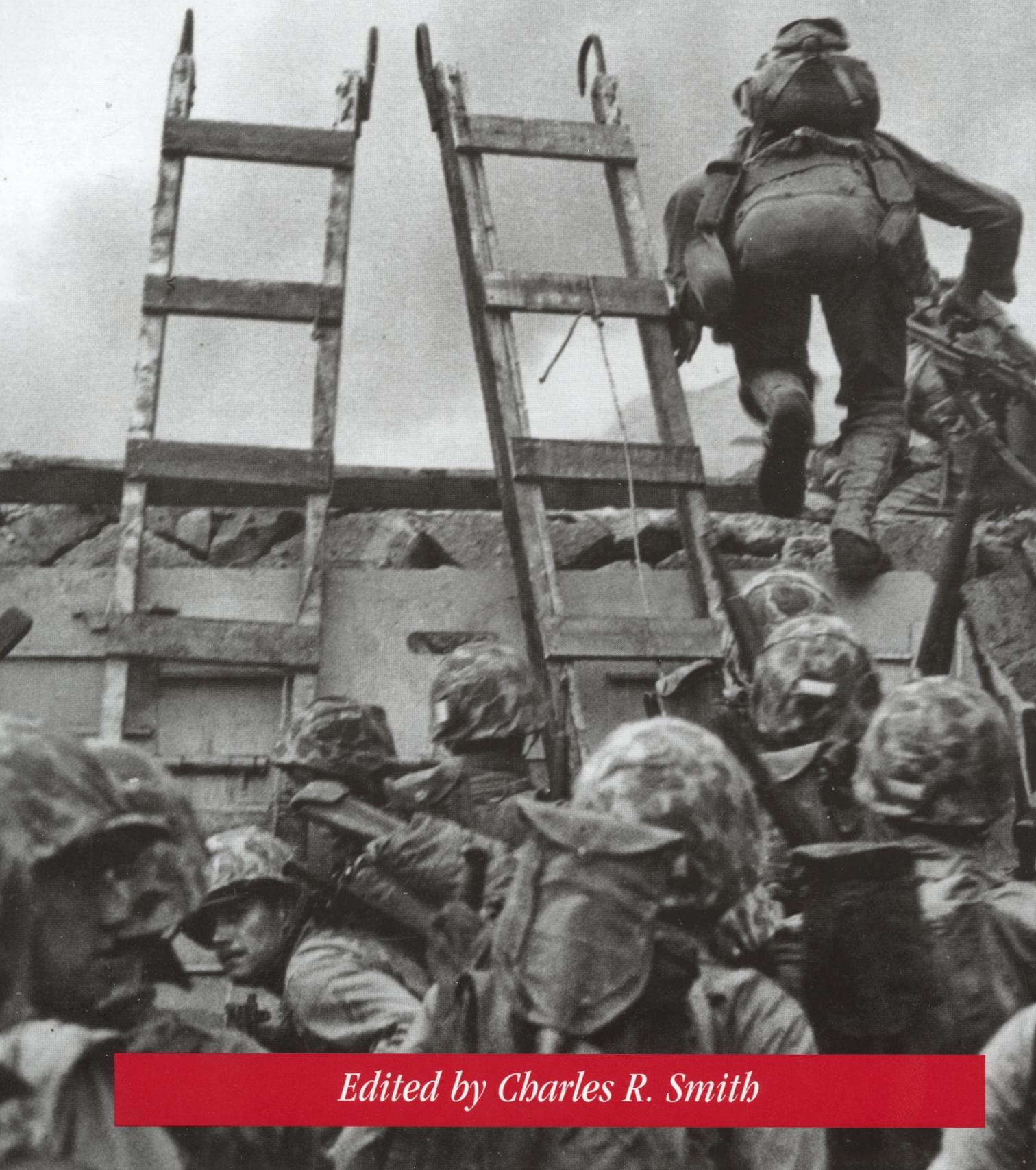


# U.S. Marines in the Korean War



*Edited by Charles R. Smith*

*On the Cover:* Using scaling ladders,  
Marines storm over the seawall at Inchon.  
Department of Defense Photo (USMC)  
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# U.S. MARINES IN THE KOREAN WAR



*Edited by  
Charles R. Smith*

History Division  
United States Marine Corps  
Washington, D.C.  
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# Foreword

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The anthology of articles that follows was compiled by the History and Museums Division during the 50th Anniversary commemoration of the Korean Conflict, 1950–1953. The focus of the various authors who wrote these historically related works on Korea did so to remember those Marines who fought and died in what some historians sometimes characterized as the “forgotten war.” Forgotten or not, the Korean conflict was without parallel in Marine Corps history and no one who experienced it or lived through this era could ever forget the difficulties that they would encounter there.

The Korean War also represented a milestone in the developmental history of the Marine Corps. For perhaps what could very well be the last time, the Marine Corps made an opposed World War II style amphibious landing against a dedicated enemy. Korea was also the opening salvo in what became known as the Cold War. In reality, Korea represented the beginning of a series of “limited wars” that would be fought by the United States with the express political purpose of keeping such conflicts from developing into full blown world wars. Frustratingly for the men and women in uniform during the Cold War, political considerations frequently overrode military exigencies and logic. Having just successfully concluded a total war against an enemy whose objectives were clearly identifiable, the Korean conflict proved fraught with political twists and turns that made the military’s job immensely more difficult. This was especially evident during the “stalemate” phase of the war, 1952–1953. No less bloody or violent, this period of the conflict saw the Marine Corps incur a significant number of casualties.

The Korean conflict was also important for operational reasons. It was clear that from 1950 on, limited wars fought by U.S. forces would be largely “come as you are affairs.” During the summer and early fall of 1950, the Marine Corps learned a valuable lesson when it had to scramble to assemble its landing force for the Inchon operation, getting the 1st Marine Division into theater in the nick of time. No longer would the United States have the luxury of time in getting forces ready for limited wars. Next, for the first time, the advent of the helicopter would play a significant role in the combat plans of Marine units in the field. Experimentation with the concept of vertical assault, using this new technology took place during the conflict. Korea would also be the first time Marines would be given personal body armor or “flak jackets” to wear in combat. Such body armor would come in handy as the war settled into a stalemate along the 38th Parallel. While Marine elements had deployed to extremely cold locations in the past such as the occupation of Iceland by the 1st Marine Brigade (Provisional) in 1941, Korea would be the first time in the modern era where the Marine Corps would have to fight in extremely cold conditions. During Korea, the Corps came away with a new appreciation for the necessity of having the proper environmental gear tested and available for use by its combat and combat support troops. In sum, Korea set the operational tone that the Marine Corps would follow for the rest of the Cold War.

My special thanks is extended to Charles R. Smith, senior historian and editor of the Korean conflict commemorative history series and to Charles D. Melson, Chief Historian. These gentlemen, under the direction of then History and Museums Division Director, Colonel John W. Ripley oversaw the painstaking process of editing the eleven separate historical pamphlets produced by the division for the 50th Anniversary of the Korean Conflict, 1950–1953.

Finally, let us pledge to never forget those Marines who served and sacrificed in this supposedly “forgotten war.” It was entirely due to their military achievements at Inchon, at Chosin Reservoir, or in foxholes and bunkers along the 38th Parallel that we have a free and thriving South Korea today.

Dr. C. P. Neimeyer  
Director of Marine Corps History

# Preface

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The Korean War was the first major armed clash between Free World and Communist forces, in what was to be called the Cold War. It was waged on land, on sea, and in the air over, and near the Korean peninsula, for more than three years. Among the U.S. forces committed on this far-off battlefield, it was once again the Marine Corps component that stood out in its sacrifice, military skills, and devotion to duty. When rushed into the battle during the first desperate weeks and months of the war, the quickly-organized and rapidly deployed 1st Provisional Marine Brigade and Marine Aircraft Group 33 helped to restore stability to the shattered U.S. Eighth Army front line around Pusan. It would be the first time that Marine air and ground elements, task organized under a single commander, had engaged in combat.

During the daringly conceived and executed United Nations counterstroke at Inchon, Marines accomplished this incredibly complex amphibious operation and the subsequent recapture of the South Korean capital, Seoul, with their customary spirit and precision, delivering a tactical blow that broke the backbone of the North Korean People's Army 1950 offensive. Never was Marine heroism and perseverance more conspicuous than during the bitter days of the Chosin Reservoir campaign, following the intervention of large-scale Chinese Communist Forces. Integrated ground and air action enabled more than 14,000 Marine, Army, and Royal Marine troops to break out of the entrapment and move south. The 1st Marine Division, considered by many to have been lost, properly evacuated its dead and wounded, brought out all operable equipment, and completed the withdrawal with tactical integrity, all the while dealing a savage blow to the enemy.

As the war of fire and movement turned into one of positional warfare that marked the final operations in Korea, the 1st Marine Division and 1st Marine Aircraft Wing again executed their respective missions with professional skill and dispatch, regardless of tactical problems and the dreary monotony that characterized the fighting around the Inje River and Hwachon Reservoir in the Punchbowl area, and the critical 35-mile front in West Korea near Panmunjom.

The more than half-century that now separates us from the Korean conflict has dimmed our collective memory. Many Korean War veterans considered themselves forgotten, their place in history sandwiched between World War II and the Vietnam War. This compilation grew out a joint endeavor by the Marine Corps History and Museums Division and Marine Corps Heritage Foundation to remedy that perceived oversight by highlighting the contributions and honoring the service of those Marines for today's Marines and the American people. The well-researched and highly-illustrated monographs, and now chapters, were written by Colonel Joseph H. Alexander, Captain John C. Chapin, Brigadier General Edwin H. Simmons, Colonel Allan R. Millet, Bernard C. Nalty, Major General John P. Condon, Commander Peter B. Mersky, USNR (Ret), and Lieutenant Colonel Ronald J. Brown, all distinguished historians, experts, or respected participants.

The authors and editor gratefully recognize and thank all who assisted in the preparation of the original monographs and of this volume by aiding in research and supplying photographs. Among them are the professional staffs of the former Marine Corps History and Museums Division, now the History Division, Quantico, Virginia; the Marine Corps Heritage Foundation, Quantico, Virginia; the Naval Historical Center, Washington, D.C.; the Archives and Special Collections Branch, Library of the Marine Corps, Quantico, Virginia; and the Modern Military Records and Still Pictures Branches of the National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland. And to the more than 150,000 Marines who served in Korea, and the 4,267 killed and 23,748 wounded in action, we say thank you.

Charles R. Smith  
Editor

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# FIRE BRIGADE

## U.S. Marines in the Pusan Perimeter

by Captain John C. Chapin, USMCR (Ret)



The Marines have landed." How familiar the phrase, how extraordinary the circumstances on 2 August 1950. Instead of a beach saturated with enemy fire, the scene was a dock in the port of Pusan in the far southeast corner of Korea. The landing force was the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade; the situation it would soon face was one of desperate crisis.

The men arriving on board the transport ships that day knew they were going into battle, and their brigade commander, Brigadier General Edward A. Craig, had made his combat standards very clear in a meeting with his officers before the ships had sailed from San Diego: "It has been necessary for troops now fighting in Korea to pull back at times, but I am stating now that no unit of this brigade will retreat except on orders from an authority higher than the 1st Marine Brigade. You will never receive an order to retreat from me. All I ask is that you fight as Marines have always fought."

At sea, no one knew where the brigade would be committed to action, and the men knew nothing

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AT LEFT: *Moving to attack: A corporal leads his automatic-rifle man through a rice paddy, oblivious to the dead enemy soldier underfoot.* Photo by David Douglas Duncan

about the forthcoming enemy except it was called the North Korean People's Army (NKPA). On board their ships they had seen the situation maps which daily showed the steadily retreating line of defense, as the enemy drove irresistably farther and farther into South Korea. The regular physical fitness drills and weapons target practice took on an urgent new sense of purpose for the Marines.

Captain Francis I. "Ike" Fenton, Jr., then executive officer of Company B, later recalled:

While on board ship our training area was limited. It was an impossibility to get the whole company together at one location. Consequently, we used passageways, boat decks, holds—any space we could find to lecture to the men and give them the little information that we had as to what was happening in Korea.

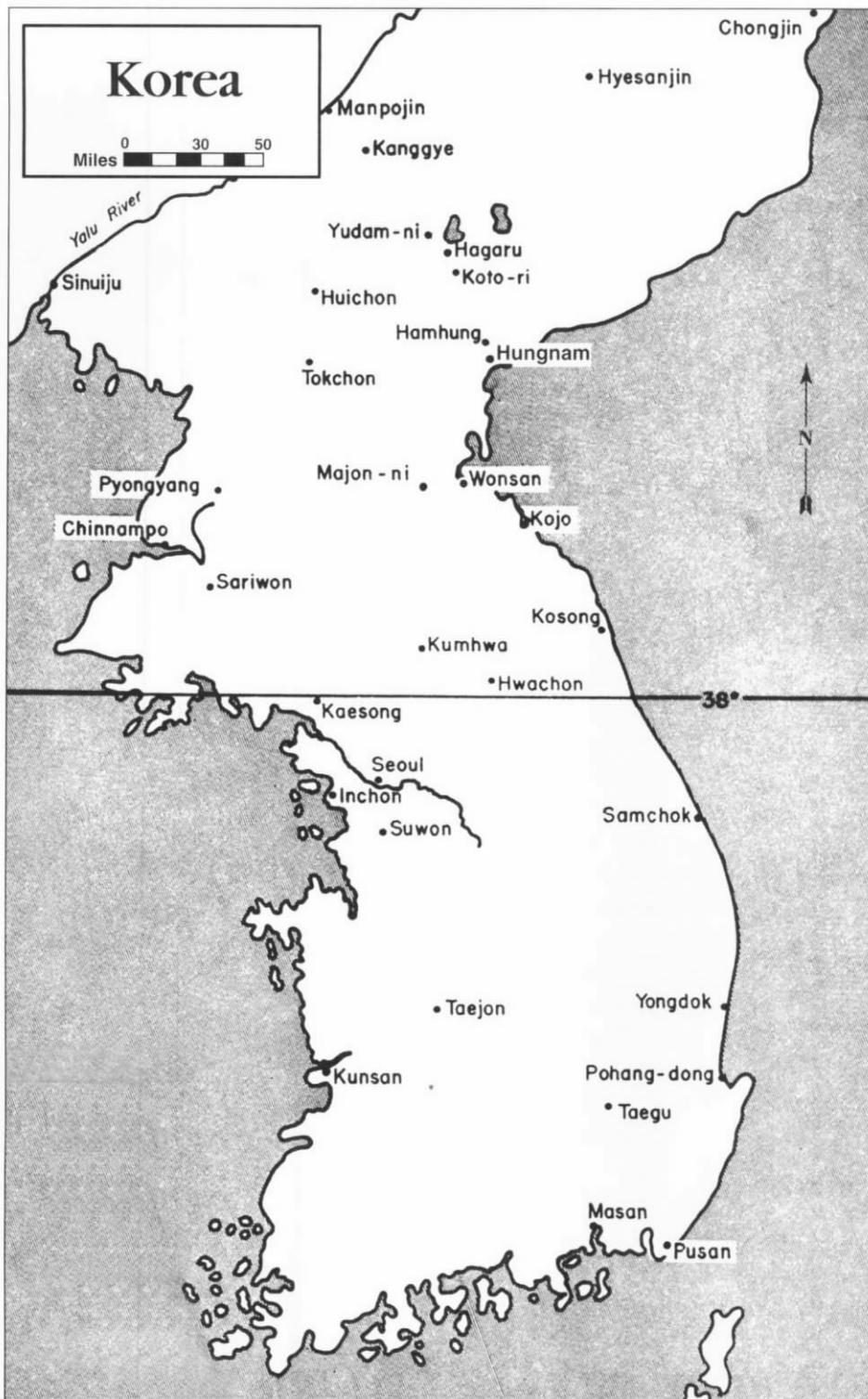
We lectured on the characteristics of the T-34 tank and told the men about the kind of land mines we might expect. A lot of time was spent on blackboard tactics for the fire team, platoon, and company. We had the 3.5 rocket launcher, but no one present had ever fired one.

A variety of old World War II ships had brought the brigade. Task Force 53.7 had 10 ships. Two transports and a light carrier, the *Badoeng Strait* (CVE-116), trans-

ported the air arm, Marine Aircraft Group 33 (MAG-33). Two LSDs (landing ships, dock), two AKAs (cargo ships, attack), and three APAs (transports, attack) provided for the ground units. Pulling up alongside the dock at Pusan, the men of the brigade were split into three main units: the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, on the *George Clymer* (APA-27), known to its passengers as the "Greasy George"; the 3d Battalion on the *Pickaway* (APA-222), with the regimental commander of the 5th Marines, Lieutenant Colonel Raymond L. Murray, on board; and the 1st Battalion on the *Henrico* (APA-45), which came limping into port last after a series of mechanical problems (even though it was known as the "Happy Hank").

Standing on the pier to meet the men was a disparate group of people: General Craig; Marines who had guarded the U.S. Embassy staff in its perilous journey all the way from the South Korean capital of Seoul to refuge in Pusan; some U.S. Army soldiers; a local band giving an earnest but painfully amateurish rendition of *The Marine Corps Hymn*; crowds of curious South Korean on-lookers; and undoubtedly some North Korean spies.

Craig was shocked to see the Marines watching the docking, as they casually leaned over the rails of their ships. He had previously sent an order through Army channels for the brigade to be prepared to march off the ships, combat ready, with weapons loaded. His



immediate, sharp inquiry to an officer on board revealed that his orders had never been received at sea. Accordingly, Craig immediately convened an officers' conference on the *Clymer*. His G-3, Lieutenant Colonel Joseph L. Stewart, announced that the brigade would move out at 0600 the following morning. This meant

the men would spend the whole night unloading the ships and issuing full supplies of ammunition and rations, so that the brigade could move out on time. After making clear that he did not yet know where the brigade would be sent by Lieutenant General Walton H. Walker, the commanding officer of the U.S. Eighth Army in Korea,

Craig concluded: "The Pusan perimeter is like a weakened dike and we will be used to plug holes in it as they open. We're a brigade, a fire brigade. It will be costly fighting against a numerically superior enemy. Marines have never yet lost a battle; this brigade will not be the first to establish such a precedent."

After a night of bedlam on the waterfront, 9,400 tons of supplies had been unloaded, but the brigade was to travel light, so most of these supplies and all personal baggage had to be left behind. Thus it was that the brigade was ready to move out on the morning of 3 August.

There was still uncertainty as to exactly where the men would enter combat. Walker's headquarters had telephoned Craig at midnight and told him to move the brigade to a town called Changwon, where Walker would temporarily hold the Marines in Eighth Army reserve. This would position the brigade strategically if Walker decided that his most pressing danger was an enemy breakthrough threat by the NKPA *6th Infantry Division* and the *83d Motorcycle Regiment*. The division was a highly professional, well-trained unit of Chinese Civil War veterans, and it had won a series of smashing victories since the invasion of South Korea a month earlier. Now these units had seized the town of Chinju and were poised to strike at the far southwestern corner of Walker's defense lines. Masan was their next probable target, and that was only 35 miles from Pusan.

The scene on the waterfront that morning was a study in contrasts. On one hand was the panicky atmosphere of the city of Pusan. A Marine officer felt it immediately: "A tension and excitement that was palpable . . . you could sense—