

# THE PROBLEMS OF U.S. MARINE CORPS PRISONERS OF WAR IN KOREA



by  
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# Foreword

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The History and Museums Division has undertaken the publication for limited distribution of various studies, theses, compilations, bibliographies, and monographs, as well as proceedings at selected workshops, seminars, symposia, and similar colloquia, which it considers to be of significant value for audiences interested in Marine Corps history. These "Occasional Papers," which are chosen for their intrinsic worth, must reflect structured research, present a contribution to historical knowledge not readily available in published sources, and reflect original content on the part of the author, compiler, or editor. It is the intent of the division that these occasional papers be distributed to selected institutions, such as service schools, official Department of Defense historical agencies, and directly concerned Marine Corps organizations, so the information contained therein will be available for study and exploitation.

At the time he wrote this thesis for his master of arts degree in American history at the University of Maryland, J. Angus MacDonald, Jr., was a major serving in the Policy Analysis Division at Headquarters Marine Corps. He had been an enlisted Marine in World War II serving in the 2d Marines in 1943, before going to Pennsylvania State College as a part of the V-12 program, and being commissioned in 1945. In the initial stages of the Korean War, he served as an instructor with the Troop Training Unit, Pacific, an assignment which evolved into a stint as platoon commander with 41 Independent Commando, Royal Marines, in Korea.

Throughout a series of stateside and overseas assignments in the 1950s and 60s, he pursued and obtained his bachelor's (1959) and master's (1961) degrees through the University of Maryland's off-campus programs. He was a student of the Marine Corps Junior School in 1956, an instructor at the Command and Staff College from 1963-66, and a student at the Army War College in 1968. He was an infantry battalion commander in the 2d Marine Division in 1966-67 and served on the plans staff at MACV in Vietnam in 1968-69. After a tour as head of the Personnel Assignment and Classification Branch at Headquarters, he served as the Marine member of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff staff group until his retirement as a colonel in 1973.

Post retirement, Colonel MacDonald was staff director of a House of Representatives Select Committee of Missing Persons in Southeast Asia, and then project manager for a number of studies for BDM Corporation on strategic lessons learned in Vietnam. Since 1982 he has made his home in the Phoenix area of Arizona.

The thesis which Colonel MacDonald authored has had a remarkable and continuing influence on the many Department of Defense studies of prisoners of war since it was written. We are reprinting it, just as it appeared in 1961 including some minor errata changes, for the use of the serious student of the POW experience and as a reference source for interested libraries. The opinions and facts represented in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the Marine Corps or the Department of the Navy. In pursuit of accuracy and objectivity, the History and Museums Division welcomes comments on this publication from interested individuals and activities.



E. H. SIMMONS  
Brigadier General, U.S. Marine Corps (Retired)  
Director of Marine Corps History and Museums



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## CHAPTER I

### TO A SHORT WAR AND A MERRY ONE

As the Marine F4U-5 Corsair made its low-altitude photo run, an antiaircraft shell arced through the air and exploded in the port wing of the plane. The pilot, Captain Jesse V. Booker, saw oil dripping from his wing and knew immediately that the port oil cooler was severely damaged. He turned toward the Yellow Sea and radioed his two wingmates that he was returning to their carrier, the USS Valley Forge.<sup>1</sup>

Within about a minute and a half the Corsair lost all of its oil supply making it impossible to continue the flight to the sea. Captain Booker was faced with the choice of parachuting or attempting to land his crippled plane deep inside enemy territory. He elected to ride the plane down. His wingmates observed him land safely and run towards a wooded area. It was 5:30 P.M., August 7, 1950.<sup>2</sup>

Hidden from above by the foliage, North Korean soldiers closed in on the downed pilot. Their presence was unobserved by the two Marine aviators still flying cover over the area.

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<sup>1</sup>USS Valley Forge message dated August 8, 1950.

<sup>2</sup>Personal interview with Major Jesse V. Booker, USMC. July 26, 1960.

Had the pilots been able to peer through the trees, they might have witnessed the capture of the first of 221 Marines known to have been taken prisoner of war by the enemy during hostilities in Korea.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this thesis is fivefold: (1) to record the combat actions in which Marines were captured by the enemy in Korea; (2) to discuss the method by which the enemy processed Marine captives; (3) to examine both North Korean and Chinese Communist interrogation and indoctrination techniques; (4) to describe individual and group experiences of Marine Corps prisoners of war in Korea; and (5) to present a phase of the Korean War which is nowhere else to be found in English except in classified security dossiers and other Marine Corps and Navy documents.

Historical and command diaries and official histories furnish the basis for describing most combat actions. Experiences of POW's are derived mainly from personal interviews and correspondence, official reports of captivity, sworn statements, official correspondence, and books and articles written by former POW's. In addition all books and documents listed in the card file of the Library of Congress were screened for any mention of U. S. Marines or any general information which might have been of value to this study including many propaganda documents published in English by

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<sup>1</sup>U. S. Marine Corps, "Korean Casualties, 25 June 1950-27 July 1953", Personnel Accounting Section, Code DGB, September 22, 1956. (Typewritten). On file in the Casualty Branch, Division of Personnel, HQMC. Cited hereafter as "USMC Casualties".

the Chinese Communists or other Communist sources. Hearings before Congressional committees which are pertinent to this thesis are also referenced.

A shadow fell over American POW's in the aftermath of the Korean War. Courts-martial and other official inquiries revealed that a small segment of the Americans captured by the Communists had been guilty of behavior ranging from questionable to treasonable. Both the Secretary of Defense's Advisory Committee on Prisoners of War and the Congress of the United States were commendatory of Marine Corps POW's. Behind these general statements, however, lies the untold story of the Marines. They played a small but significant role.

Each of the 221 Marines captured faced critical problems which, to him at least, were unique. The problems ranged from such basic drives as survival to complicated and abstract questions involving honor, duty, compassion and understanding.

The first problem faced by most POW's was that of capture itself. Is capture unavoidable or is there in some cases a reasonable alternative? If capture is his unwitting fate, how should a Marine comport himself after capture? Is it his duty overtly to resist the enemy at all cost and at every turn, or should he attempt to outwit him, perhaps by giving useless or false information? What are his responsibilities of leadership or subordination? What impact did the Communist germ warfare campaign have on Marines? Did treatment of Marines vary depending on rank, specialty, or date and circumstances of capture? And finally, how did Marines measure up?

The Marine Corps POW story began on August 7, 1950, the eighth anniversary of the amphibious attack on Guadalcanal and the date the first Marine was captured in a new war. A Department of Defense press release of that date listed 873 American soldiers and airmen missing in action.<sup>1</sup> A few of that number were alive and in enemy hands, and Captain Booker met some of them shortly after his capture.

Captain Booker's introduction to captivity was painful and abrupt. He barely cleared his aircraft and reached the concealment of nearby trees when a group of North Korean soldiers surrounded him. The only alternative to surrender was to fight a hopeless battle using his service revolver against the more powerful and numerous rifles of his enemies. Had he done so he would inevitably have been killed or wounded. The Koreans denied him any freedom of choice by rushing in and overwhelming him.

There had been no chance for escape. He was some 200 miles from the nearest friendly ground troops, and helicopter rescue operations were not highly developed at that stage in hostilities, so rescue by that means was virtually impossible.

During World War II, in which he destroyed three Japanese aircraft, Captain Booker had received numerous briefings on escape and evasion. Such briefings have long been a routine part of combat aviators' daily lives, tacit recognition of the possibility of capture in the event of misfortune while over enemy territory. Similar briefings were conducted

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<sup>1</sup>The Evening Star (Washington), August 7, 1950, p. A4.

during the Korean War, and at no time was it suggested that death was preferable to capture.

As soon as he was disarmed, the North Koreans beat him mercilessly. They struck him repeatedly across the chest and body with their rifles until they beat him senseless. He was then dragged and pushed to a temporary cell in a nearby village. Eventually he reached the vicinity of Pyongyang where he joined a group of American officer prisoners. They were as pitiful a sight as Booker himself---beaten, half starved, and filthy. Many had foul-smelling, septic wounds. The Marine became the 39th member of the group.<sup>1</sup>

By the end of August the Communist propaganda mill showed that it had been at work. The Russian delegate to the United Nations, Jacob A. Malik, claimed to have received a cable in the form of a protest by 39 captured American officers "against further senseless bloodshed in Korea." The supposed petitioners included the name of Jesse V. Booker.<sup>2</sup>

On several occasions the North Koreans took one or two captured American officers from their cell and placed them before a firing squad. Sometimes they went through all the motions of an execution without actually firing the fatal shots. At other times the tableau ended with the sharp crack of rifles and one or two American officers fell dead. Some, like Major John Joseph Dunn of the Army and Captain Booker of the Marine Corps, faced the firing squads several times. Others were less fortunate. The original group of 39 officers

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<sup>1</sup>Booker interview.

<sup>2</sup>The Evening Star, August 31, 1950, p. B14.

dwindled to eight. Major Dunn and Captain Booker were among the eight.<sup>1</sup>

In September the Communists released a photograph of several prisoners of war. Eastfoto, a New York agency distributing official Russian pictures in the United States, obtained the picture from the China Photo Service in Peking, China. Two prisoners in the foreground were easily identifiable as Major Dunn and Captain Booker.<sup>2</sup> Shortly after the photograph was taken the small group of prisoners began a long tortuous march north to the Yalu River.<sup>3</sup>

The 1st Provisional Marine Brigade (Reinforced) debarked at Pusan on August 2, 1950 and received its baptism of fire on August 7th, the same day that Booker was shot down. During the 67 days of its existence, the Brigade spent 41 days in the Pusan Perimeter fighting three significant offensive engagements with the North Korean enemy. Their aggressiveness, discipline and esprit were noted by a British observer, among others, and the Brigade was later awarded the Korean Presidential Unit Citation.<sup>4</sup>

Marines traditionally take care of their dead and wounded and the thought of Marines missing in action is repugnant. Yet on August 13, 1950 within the Pusan Perimeter

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<sup>1</sup>Booker interview.

<sup>2</sup>The Evening Star, September 22, 1950, p. A6.

<sup>3</sup>Booker interview.

<sup>4</sup>Louis Heren, "The Korean Scene", Brassey's Annual, The Armed Forces Yearbook, (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1951), p. 102.



eight Marines were left to the enemy.<sup>1</sup> Company B, 5th Marines, on Hill 202<sup>2</sup> received the brunt of a North Korean attack beginning at 4:55 A.M. that morning. The initial onslaught overran a machine gun section wiping out all but two men. The company commander was directed to disengage at 6:30 A.M. Although it appeared certain that the eight Marines of the machine-gun section had been killed, the company commander requested a delay of one hour before withdrawing in order to counterattack and recover the bodies. The urgency of their redeployment ruled out any delay, however, and the Marines reluctantly left Hill 202. Seven of the missing Marines were transferred to the killed in action list the following month when their bodies were recovered.

One ground Marine captured during the hectic days of August, 1950, made good his escape shortly after capture. Private First Class Richard E. Barnett, a radio-jeep driver, was returning to his own unit when he made a wrong turn and blundered into a group of North Koreans. The enemy opened fire with automatic weapons and disabled his motor. The

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<sup>1</sup>Derived from the following sources:

1st Provisional Marine Brigade (Reinforced), Fleet Marine Force, Special Action Report, 2 August to 6 September, 1950. A Report of Operations with Eighth U. S. Army in Korea. Appendix 8 to Annex A, p. 1; and

Lynn Montross and Captain Nicholas A. Canzona, U. S. Marine Operations in Korea, Vol. 1: The Pusan Perimeter (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1957), pp. 152-56; and

Andrew Geer, The New Breed (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952), pp. 53-55.

<sup>2</sup>202 meters high. Hills are generally designated by their height above sea level, and often descriptive names will be used as well.

windshield was shattered. Barnett started to return the fire, but he was successful in getting off only one shot. The magazine of his carbine had fallen out of the receiver, and after the round in the chamber fired he was unable to fire again.

The Koreans closed in and took him prisoner. He was beaten, searched, and then interrogated. His personal belongings were taken from him, including his wedding ring. His captors refused to feed him, and he was placed in a root cellar of a Korean house. Four North Koreans were posted as guards in the area to prevent his escape. During two days and nights of captivity, he was given no food other than a few crackers. On the third night, for some unaccountable reason, the Koreans took him along on what presumably was an attack against UN positions.

As they moved towards the objective Barnett noticed that of the several Koreans with him all but one had gotten considerably ahead. As he crossed a dry stream bed he stumbled deliberately and grabbed a rock as he fell. Then he struck the nearby guard in the face with the rock and ran for safety. Although the other guards fired at him, the distance between them gave him some measure of protection and he safely eluded the guards. Later he hid in another root cellar and shortly thereafter rejoined his own forces.<sup>1</sup>

Barnett was one of the early Marine captives and one of the few to escape. While there is nothing unusual about

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<sup>1</sup>Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps, Public Information Release 81, September, 1950.

his experience, the treatment he received at the hands of the North Koreans was similar to the pattern that developed throughout the war in that he was isolated, refused food and water, and kept under a strong guard. Had it not been for the fortuitous laxity of his guards and his own ingenuity under pressure, Barnett might well have been another statistic on the missing in action lists. As it was, he returned to his parent unit before his name ever appeared on the casualty lists, and, therefore, he is not one of the cases with which we will deal later.

On the evening of September 5th, the 1st Marine Brigade was relieved by elements of the 2d Division of Eighth Army. The Marines commenced moving to Pusan in the icy rain preparatory to embarkation for the Inchon landing ten days later. The score for 42 days of violent combat was 148 killed, 15 died of wounds, nine missing (of whom seven were reclassified "killed in action" when their bodies were found in September), and 730 wounded in action.<sup>1</sup> An estimated 9,900 casualties were inflicted on the enemy. The two missing Marines were never found, and screening of all repatriated prisoners of war failed to disclose any information concerning their fate. It is reasonable to presume that they were killed in the action and their bodies lost.

Considering the intensity of action and the losses suffered by other units during the same period, the Brigade casualties were remarkably light.

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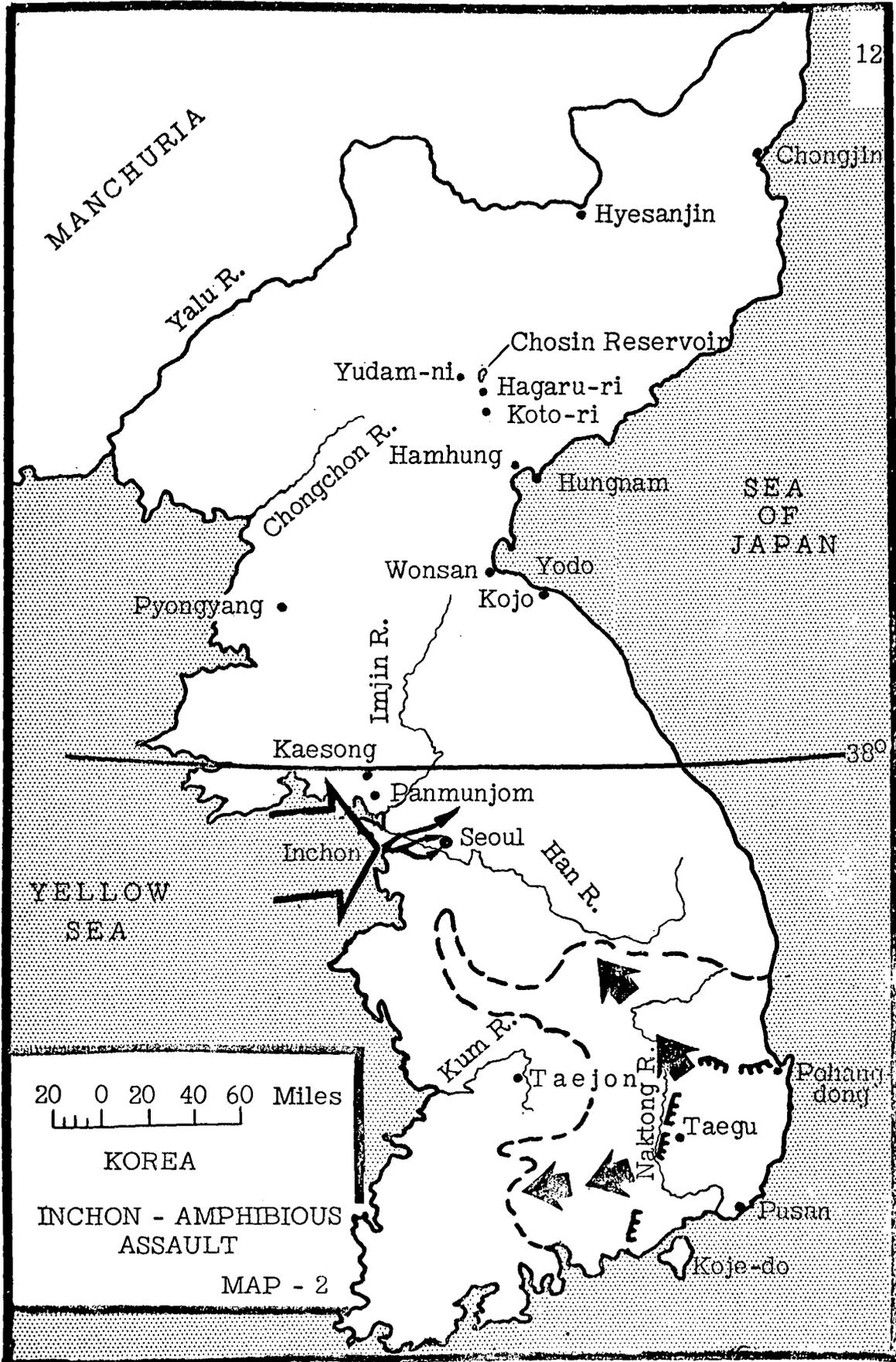
<sup>1</sup>Montross and Canzona, I, 239.

The 1st Marine Brigade was deactivated on September 13th, and its units reverted to their normal parent organizations within the framework of the newly arrived 1st Marine Division. General MacArthur's master thrust, the amphibious assault on Inchon, took place on September 15, 1950, and the operation was spearheaded by the 1st Marine Division.

D-Day was dark and cloudy. Skies were overcast and rain fell intermittently during the late afternoon and into the night. Visibility was obscured by the rain and by clouds of dust and dirt thrown into the air by naval gunfire bombardment and air strikes. The Marines landed against moderate opposition and casualties were light. The assault on Wolmido, an island lying off the port of Inchon and guarding its approaches, took place on September 15th, and the attack was successful. The simultaneous landing at Inchon resulted in the successful seizure of that city by the 16th. Kimpo Airfield fell on the 18th, and at dawn on the 20th the Han River crossing began.<sup>1</sup> By the night of the 20th, the 5th Marines were well established beyond the north bank of the river. Amphibious vehicles and tractors rumbled back and forth across the river carrying wiremen who laid telephone wire and attempted to repair breaks in submerged lines already laid. The services of about 50 wiremen were required to keep wire communications in between the command posts of the division commander and the 5th Marines.

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<sup>1</sup>Lynn Montross and Captain Nicholas A. Canzona, U. S. Marine Operations in Korea, Vol. II: The Inchon-Seoul Operation (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1957), p. 194.



MANCHURIA

Yalu R.

Chongchon R.

Imjin R.

Han R.

Kum R.

Naktong R.

SEA OF JAPAN

YELLOW SEA

20 0 20 40 60 Miles

KOREA

INCHON - AMPHIBIOUS ASSAULT

MAP - 2

38°

Chongjin

Hyesanjin

Chosin Reservoir

Yudam-ni

Hagaru-ri

Koto-ri

Hamhung

Hungnam

Wonsan

Yodo

Kojo

Pyongyang

Kaesong

Danmunjom

Incheon

Seoul

Taejon

Taegu

Pohang-dong

Pusan

Koje-do

One party of five wiremen from the Division Signal Battalion was assigned to the 5th Marine Regiment to aid in keeping the wire in.<sup>1</sup> The wire laying party did not report back to their parent unit on the 21st. At first little concern was felt over their absence. It was assumed that they were still with the regiment. When reports received at the 1st Signal Battalion command post indicated that a second party of wiremen had been ambushed, suffering three killed and two wounded an inquiry was made to the communications officer of the 5th Regiment. He reported that the wire party assigned to him on the previous day was not with the 5th Marines at that time. The following day, September 21st, it was learned that the five men had been ambushed much like the second group. Two of the group were killed and their bodies recovered. The remaining three Marines were missing.<sup>2</sup> North Korean prisoners captured on September 21st stated they believed other North Korean soldiers in the locality had taken three or four Marines back to Yong Dong Po as prisoners.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>1st Signal Battalion, 1st Marine Division, Special Action Report on Inchon-Kimpo-Seoul Operation, Annex GG to 1st Marine Division Special Action Report, 15 September-8 October, 1950, Vol. II of III. (Mimeographed).

<sup>2</sup>1st Marine Division Casualty Bulletin 6-50, September 26, 1950.

<sup>3</sup>Letter from the Commanding Officer, 1st Signal Battalion, 1st Marine Division, dated September 25, 1950 cited by Casualty Reviewing Officer, Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps, letter DNA-1702-mjl of September 17, 1951 to Head, Personnel Affairs Branch, Personnel Department, Headquarters U. S. Marine Corps. Cited hereafter as Casualty Section letter.

When all returning American prisoners of war had been debriefed after the end of hostilities, only one of the three missing Marines could positively be listed as having been a prisoner of war. He was Corporal Gilbert A. Vannosdall.<sup>1</sup> The twenty-two year old corporal died from malnutrition, exposure and frostbite on November 12, 1950 less than two months after his capture along the Han River.<sup>2</sup>

After successfully fighting its way across the Han, the Marine division continued the attack for Kalchong Creek, Yong Dung Po, and finally Seoul itself.

The final attack on Seoul began on September 25, 1950. In two weeks the 1st Marine Division had taken that city and plunged on to seize Suyuhyon, 15 miles northwest of Seoul, and Uijongbu, 10 miles due north from the capital city. Marine casualties for the entire period of the Inchon-Seoul operation, September 15 to October 7, were 366 killed in action, 49 died of wounds, 2,029 wounded in action, and six missing in action. The six included Corporal Vannosdall, the only ground Marine known to have been captured alive by North Koreans up to that time. The 1st Marine Division was responsible for adding some 6,492 enemy prisoners to our stockades. This figure represents the final tally after

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<sup>1</sup>USMC Casualties.

<sup>2</sup>Based on information furnished by recovered prisoners of war after the Armistice. Casualty Section letter DNA-2305-mmt, November 17, 1953.

intelligence screening of captives weeded out innocent civilians who, through the fortunes of war, were unavoidably seized and detained by the Marines. In addition to the prisoners captured, the Marine Division inflicted an estimated 13,666 killed and wounded on the reeling Korean forces.<sup>1</sup>

After the Inchon and Seoul operations, the war appeared to be entering its final stages. North Korean forces facing Army and Marine units in west central Korea had been thoroughly beaten. The bulk of the Communists, who only weeks earlier had been hammering at the shrinking Pusan perimeter, now fell backward under pressure from the U. S. Eighth Army, U. S. Tenth Corps, and the rejuvenated Republic of Korea forces.

Royal Marines of the 41st Independent Commando, then assigned to the Commander of U. S. Naval Forces, Far East, were impatient to carry out demolition raids against lines of communication of the east coast. They feared there would be no tunnels or bridges left to destroy. As they readied themselves for combat raids in the waning days of September, they drank to a short war and a merry one.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Montross and Canzona, II, Appendix J, 333.

<sup>2</sup>The author commanded a platoon of D Troop, 41st Independent Commando, Royal Marines, on two combat raids in October, 1950, and joined in the toast.

## CHAPTER II

### HORDES FROM THE ROOF OF KOREA

After completing the Inchon-Seoul campaign, the 1st Marine Division returned to the ships of Amphibious Group One and prepared to move around to the opposite coast of Korea. The Marines were scheduled to land in amphibious assault at Wonsan, the strategic eastern terminus of the transpeninsula communication system. D-Day, initially set for 15 October, was pushed back repeatedly because of two factors: the Republic of Korea I Corps advanced up the east coast of Korea and seized the Marine objective of Wonsan by October 11, and the North Koreans, under Soviet tutelage, laid an estimated 2,000 mines in and around the approaches to Wonsan Harbor and Kalma Peninsula, thus making an early landing impossible.<sup>1</sup> The Marines were delayed until October 25, the day after Bob Hope, Marilyn Maxwell, and their entertainment group flew in to the Wonsan airstrip and put on their show.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Geer, p. 18.

<sup>2</sup>Lynn Montross and Captain Nicholas A. Canzona, U. S. Marine Operations in Korea, Vol. III: The Chosin Reservoir Campaign (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1957), p. 31.

Unhampered by Communist mines, Marine aviation units had flown in to Wonsan airfield beginning on October 14.<sup>1</sup> Marine Fighter Squadron 312 and All-Weather Fighter Squadron 513 operated from the Wonsan strip. Two additional Marine Fighter Squadrons, VMF's-214 and 323, operated from the decks of the Escort Carriers Sicily and Badoeng Strait.

Optimism was growing over the possibility of an early end to the fighting. Even General MacArthur, then Commander in Chief, Far East, predicted that the war would end shortly.<sup>2</sup> In this aura of confidence and enthusiasm United Nations aircraft ranged unopposed through Korean skies. The Marines flew sorties to provide cover for administrative landings of their own troops, to evacuate casualties, to reconnoiter lines of communications, and to attack retreating bodies of North Koreans.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, after seemingly endless delays, elements of the 1st Marine Division landed on Kalma Peninsula and proceeded to move out in accordance with 1st Marine Division Operation Order 18-50. The 1st Marine Regiment deployed in the Wonsan area with battalions at Kojo, 35

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<sup>1</sup>1st Marine Aircraft Wing, Historical Diary, October 1950. Cited hereafter as 1st MAW HistD, and Marine Aircraft Group - 12, Special Action Report, Annex K to 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, Special Action Report, 10 October 1950 to 15 December 1950. pp. 1-2. Cited hereafter as MAG-12 SAR and 1st MAW SAR.

<sup>2</sup>James F. Schnabel, The Korean Conflict: Policy, Planning, Direction. (Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History). Cited by Montross and Canzona, III, 35.

<sup>3</sup>1st MAW HistD, October 1950.

miles to the south, and at Majon-ni, 28 miles to the west.<sup>1</sup> The 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, entrained to Kojo on October 26 to set up defensive positions surrounding a Republic of Korea Army supply dump which, ironically, the Korean garrison stripped bare when they departed the same date. The following night well disciplined North Korean troops struck the 1st Battalion perimeter. According to subsequent prisoner interrogation, the enemy numbered over 1,000.<sup>2</sup> Twenty-three Marines were killed and 47 were wounded in the action. The missing in action figure, the dread of all Marine commanders, was initially reported as 34.<sup>3</sup> When stragglers returned and bodies were recovered and identified, only four Marines were unaccounted for. Presumably they were killed in the action. Their bodies were never recovered and none of the four was ever reported alive in any of the prisoner of war camps.

As November dawned crisp and cold in North Korea, only one Marine, Captain Jesse V. Booker, was in the hands of the enemy. November, however, was to prove one of the most costly of all months for Marines.

North Korean resistance was no longer organized, but ominous reports of contact with Chinese troops began

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<sup>1</sup>Montross and Canzona, III, 56.

<sup>2</sup>Commander in Chief, Far East, message of October 29, 1950.

<sup>3</sup>Commanding Officer, 1st Marines, message of October 28, 1950.

cropping up. One Chinese soldier was captured on October 28 at Unsan and two more were taken at Onjong the following day.<sup>1</sup> During the first week of November, 1950, the 7th Marines fought several spirited engagements against Chinese and North Korean forces. Total Marine division casualties for the week were 93 killed in action or died of wounds, 434 wounded in action, and one missing in action.<sup>2</sup> The latter was never heard of again.

Ground activity fell off for most of the remainder of the month. Sporadic contacts were made until the final week of November when the Chinese intervened in force.

Eighth Army launched a general assault at 10:00 A.M. on November 24th.<sup>3</sup> The operation was heralded by a MacArthur communique of the same date:

The United Nations massive compression envelopment in North Korea against the new Red Armies operating there is now approaching its decisive effort. . . . If successful, this should for all practical purposes end the war, restore peace and unity to Korea, enable the prompt withdrawal of United Nations military forces and permit the complete assumption by the Korean people and nation of full sovereignty and international equality.<sup>4</sup>

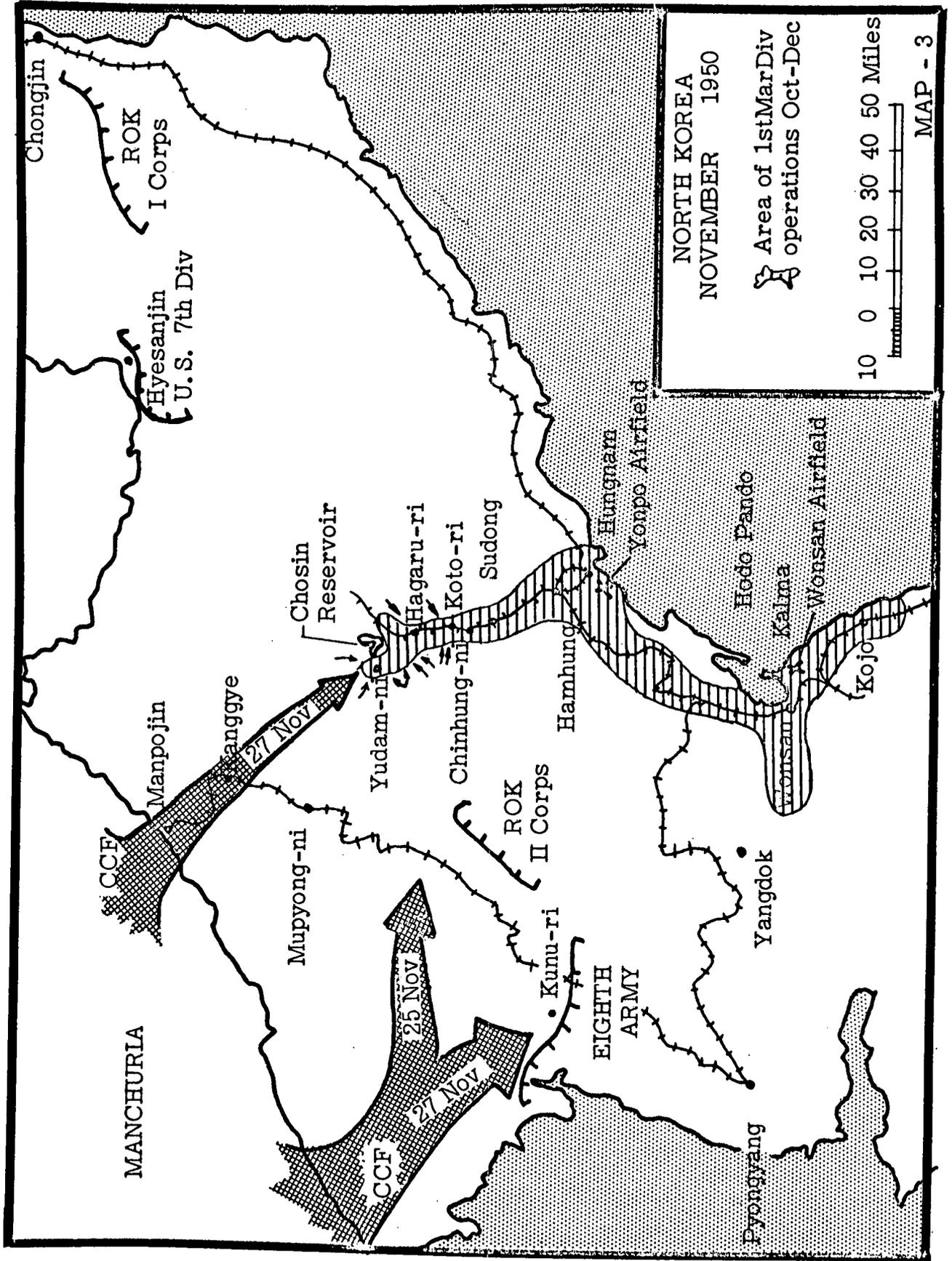
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<sup>1</sup>Commander in Chief, Far East, Situation Report for the period 6:00 A.M. October 29, 1950 to 6:00 A.M. October 30, 1950. Cited hereafter as CinCFE Sit Rep.

<sup>2</sup>Montross and Canzona, III, Appendix E, 381, and "USMC Casualties."

<sup>3</sup>CinCFE Sit Rep November 24, 1950.

<sup>4</sup>Commander in Chief, United Nations Command, Communique 12, November 12, 1950. Cited by Montross and Canzona, III, 144.



NORTH KOREA  
 NOVEMBER 1950  
 Area of 1stMarDiv  
 operations Oct-Dec

10 0 10 20 30 40 50 Miles

MAP - 3

The 1st Marine Division was to be the right jaw of the "massive compression" pincers. Previous orders to attack north along the east side of the Chosin Reservoir were changed and the Marines were directed to seize Mupyong-ni, 55 miles to the west and on the Pyongyang-Manpojin railroad line. Seizure of Mupyong-ni would destroy the final assembly area of the NKPA remnants, close the jaws on the enemy, and permit the Marines to turn right and drive to the Yalu.

At this point, the 1st Marine Division was disposed as follows. The 5th Marines were east of Chosin Reservoir preparing to turn over that area to Army units from the 7th Division. These army units suffered a tragic fate within a week. The 7th Marines were enroute to Yudam-ni where they later occupied four of the five major ridges surrounding the town. These two Marine regiments were the first to meet the opening Chinese offensive in northeast Korea. The 1st Marines were in the act of displacing north to the Chinhung-ni, Koto-ri, Hagaru-ri area. The 11th Marine Regiment, the organic division artillery, was also about to displace most of its battalions to the Yudam-ni perimeter from which it could support the planned attack to the west. The division commander directed that the attack west begin at 8:00 A.M. on November 27th.<sup>1</sup>

The 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, now under operational control of 5th Air Force, was to provide tactical air

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<sup>1</sup>1st Marine Division, Operation Order 24-50, November 26, 1950. Cited hereafter as 1st MarDiv OpnO.

support for the Tenth Corps. The Wing was deployed principally at Wonsan, Korea, but with two squadrons aboard carriers and other elements at Itami, Japan.<sup>1</sup> Although Wing units played a vital role in supporting the division during the crucial period in northeast Korea, no aviation personnel were captured by the enemy during these operations, and therefore the aviation half of the Marine team will not come in for more than brief mention. Marine aviation casualties were light throughout the Chosin Reservoir campaign; two officers were killed and one was wounded, and six enlisted personnel were killed and five were wounded during the two months of combat in far North Korea.<sup>2</sup>

The first inkling of disaster came on the 25th. The II ROK Corps operating in northwestern Korea as part of Eighth Army, was suddenly hurled back by Chinese forces. The situation seemed stable elsewhere, but the status of the ROK Corps was referred to by Eighth Army's intelligence officer as ". . . the relatively vague situation on the east flank. . ." <sup>3</sup>

A Marine unit made contact with Chinese on the 26th. Three prisoners captured by the 7th Marines asserted that the 20th CCF Army had arrived in the Yudam-ni area a week

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<sup>1</sup>1st MAW SAR, October-December, 1950, pp. 1-2.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., Annex A, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup>Eighth U. S. Army in Korea, Periodic Intelligence Report 137, p. 4. Cited by Montross and Canzona, III, 146-47.

earlier. The prisoners reported that the Chinese planned to move south and cut the main supply route after two Marine regiments passed.<sup>1</sup> Six Chinese divisions had now been identified in the vicinity of X Corps, but what course of action they might pursue was problematical.

The enemy demonstrated his intent to fight in northwestern Korea when, on the 26th, the second day of his attack caused the II ROK Corps virtually to disintegrate.<sup>2</sup> That night the temperature dropped abruptly to zero degrees Fahrenheit.

November 27th was clear and cold. The Marine attack began as planned and almost immediately encountered resistance. By nightfall the main attack, by the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, had netted less than a mile. Ancillary attacks by the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, on adjacent ridges gained from 1,200 to 2,000 yards.<sup>3</sup> Resistance had been heavy throughout the day.

A jeep from the 4th Battalion, 11th Marines, left the artillery regiment message center in Hagaru bound for Battery H to the north. The driver turned south by mistake, and, after proceeding for about two miles, the jeep and its driver were captured by an enemy roadblock and apparently the driver was killed. Until that time no

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<sup>1</sup>Commanding Officer, 7th Marines, message of November 26, 1950.

<sup>2</sup>Montross and Canzona, III, 163-72.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 157.

enemy activity had been observed in the area.<sup>1</sup>

First Lieutenant Robert C. Messman and his Battery K, 4/11, equipped with 155mm howitzers, had been attached to the 1st Battalion, a 105mm howitzer unit. The larger guns were used principally to provide illuminating fires. Having recently displaced from the east side of Chosin Reservoir to the Yudam-ni area, Lieutenant Messman was concerned about the arrival of his ammunition supply. As darkness approached he talked to the 1/11 operations officer, Captain Philip N. Pierce, and informed the Captain of his intention to drive south to Hagaru in order to speed up the delivery of his 155mm ammunition. Messman and his driver, PFC George H. Vann, climbed into their jeep and embarked on the lonely trip along the solitary mountain road. The two Marines never arrived at Hagaru. Chinese had already infiltrated the mountains between Yudam-ni and Hagaru-ri and even then were preparing a major attack scheduled to begin within minutes.

From the standpoint of the artillery regiment, the Battery K Commander and his driver simply vanished. Their jeep, abandoned alongside the road, gave inconclusive evidence of the fate that had overtaken the two Marines.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>11th Marines, Special Action Report, Annex SS to 1st MarDiv SAR, October-December, 1950, p. 6. Cited hereafter as 11th Mar. SAR.

<sup>2</sup>Personal interview with LtCol Philip N. Pierce, USMC, December 7, 1960. 1st MarDiv Casualty Bulletin 73-50 dated December 12, 1950, reported 1stLt Messman and PFC Vann missing in action.

At dusk the temperature dropped abruptly for the second day in a row, this time to a numbing 20 degrees below zero Fahrenheit. With the coming of darkness and intense cold, thousands of Chinese began to move over the crusted snow. Three divisions of the enemy closed in on two regiments of Marines. Two of the Communist divisions struck Yudam-ni. The third slipped south to cut the 14 mile-long supply route which led southeast to Hagaru.<sup>1</sup>

At 8:45 P.M., November 27, 1950, a platoon outpost north of Yudam-ni repulsed a minor probe. Fifteen minutes later and two and a half miles west, elements of Company D, 5th Marines, likewise repulsed a minor probe. Within minutes a sustained mortar bombardment struck the Marine positions to the west. Machine-gun fire raked the same positions. By midnight Northwest Ridge and North Ridge were under heavy attack.<sup>2</sup> The Chinese took full advantage of the terrain and sneaked up on Companies E and F, 5th Marines. Their initial attack was repulsed, but at day-break whistles and bugles signalled another effort and the determined Asiatics launched a battalion strength attack in a second attempt to overwhelm the Marines by sheer numbers.<sup>3</sup> Two Company F Marines were captured

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<sup>1</sup>Montross and Canzona, III, 163-72.

<sup>2</sup>Except as noted the actions in the Chosin Reservoir area are based upon 1st MarDiv HistD's, November and December, 1950; 1st MarDiv SAR, October-December, 1950; and Montross and Canzona, III.

<sup>3</sup>2d Battalion, 5th Marines, SAR, Annex B to 5th Mar. SAR., Annex QQ to 1st MarDiv SAR, October-December, 1950, pp. 33-34. Cited hereafter as 2/5 SAR.

during the confusion and close-in action. They were Privates First Class Kyle Reasor, who died in captivity, and Troy Williford who survived to return home during the POW exchange after the armistice.

In the predawn hours Company H, 7th Marines, was forced to pull back, opening a portion of Northwest Ridge to the enemy. A platoon outpost of Company I, 5th Marines, on North Ridge was overrun exposing the battalion commander's command post to direct enemy attack. Elsewhere on North Ridge the Chinese paid some 250 casualties in their attempt to dislodge Company E, 7th Marines, from Hill 1282. Marines suffered about 150 casualties on that same hill including Corporal Robert Arias who was captured. He lived to return during Operation Big Switch.

On the adjacent hill, 1240, Captain Milton Hull's Company D, 7th Marines, was cut to ribbons and overrun. The rugged company commander, though wounded, led a fierce counterattack and restored the position. He had only 16 men left capable of fighting. The Chinese had managed to capture one Company D Marine, Private First Class Mickey K. Scott. Counting one Marine captured earlier on Southwest Ridge, Corporal Clifford R. Hawkins, and the two artillerymen, the enemy bagged five prisoners of war for their night's activities. They killed 38 and wounded 186 Marines. Their own cost was fearful. A reasonable estimate places their casualties at 600 to 700 killed in the action.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

To the southeast, Companies C and F of the 7th Marines each maintained lonely vigils at widely separated points along the sole route of egress from Yudam-ni south. The 59th CCF Division, which had slipped past Yudam-ni, hurled attacks in strength against both company perimeters. Company C was hard hit and was withdrawn the following day.

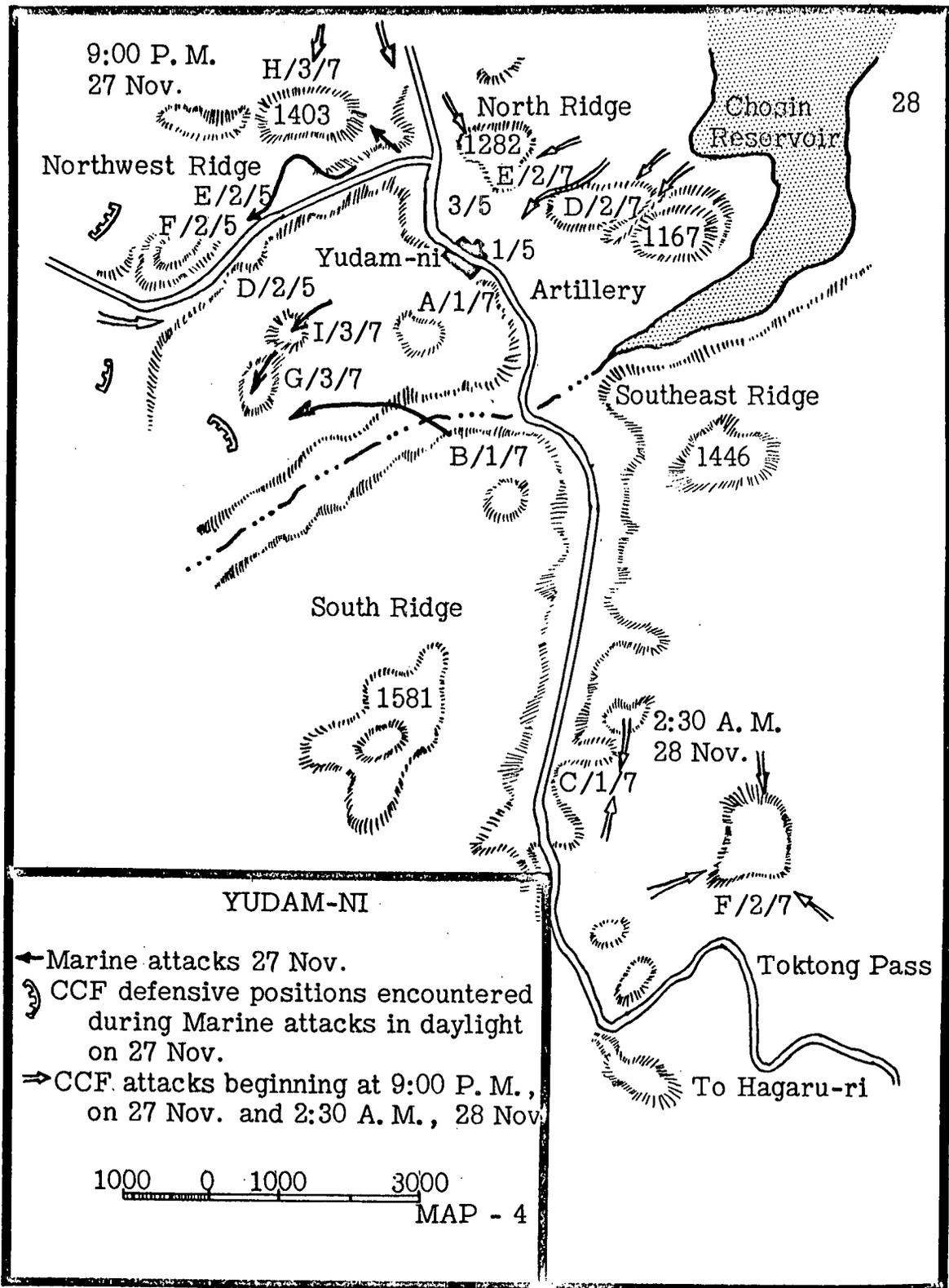
Company F held Toktong Pass, the most vital terrain along the entire 14-mile route.<sup>1</sup> The pass was located six miles southeast of Yudam-ni as the crow flies, at extreme range for supporting artillery. They were to hold at all cost. Captain William E. Barber, commanding Company F, had required his men to dig in before erecting any warming tents. They had completed their task as darkness fell on the 27th. The perimeter remained quiet past midnight. But at 2:30 A.M. on the 28th, the Chinese struck from three directions. In his first assault from the high ground to the north the enemy swarmed over the forward positions of Lieutenant Robert C. McCarthy's platoon.<sup>2</sup> The lieutenant had deployed his men with two

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<sup>1</sup>Except as noted the action at Toktong Pass is derived from the following sources:

Interview of First Sergeant Charles C. Dana and Staff Sergeant Richard E. Danford, Company F, 7th Marines, by Captain A. Z. Freeman, in Korea on April 7, 1951. Filed with 1st Provisional Historical Platoon Interviews, April 17, 1951, No. 1, in G-3 Historical Branch Archives, Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps; and, Lynn Montross, "Ridgerunners of Toktong Pass", Marine Corps Gazette, May 1953, pp. 16-23; and Montross and Canzona, III, pp. 177-96; and Geer, pp. 288-90.

<sup>2</sup>Robert C. McCarthy, "Fox Hill," Marine Corps Gazette, March 1953, pp. 16-23.



squads forward and one slightly to the rear in supporting positions. Fifteen Marines were killed and nine wounded in the initial onslaught. The eight remaining Marines fell back slightly. A head count later revealed that three Marines were missing. They were Corporal Wayne A. Pickett and Privates First Class Robert L. Batdorff and Daniel D. Yesko.<sup>1</sup> Search of the area after the position was restored failed to locate the three missing Marines and for very good reason. The Chinese had captured them in the first rush, and had immediately taken them back into the hills. All three were returned in the prisoner exchange at the end of hostilities.

The Chinese persisted for four more days in their attacks against Fox Hill as it came to be known. Casualties mounted inside the perimeter, but with supply by air drop, occasional artillery support from Yudam-ni, and close air support at critical times in the battle, Company F was able to exact an exorbitant price from the attackers.

At 2:00 A.M. on November 30th, Marines at their fighting positions heard a voice yelling in English, "Fox Company, you are surrounded. I am a Lieutenant from the 11th Marines. The Chinese will give you warm clothing and good treatment. Surrender now!"<sup>2</sup> The Chinese did, in

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<sup>1</sup>1st MarDiv, Casualty Bulletin 89-50, December 27 1950.

<sup>2</sup>McCarthy, Marine Corps Gazette, May 1953, p. 21.

fact, hold Marine First Lieutenant Messman from the 11th Marines. He had been captured two days earlier within a few miles of Toktong Pass. Was it he? Or was it really an Oriental voice?

When finally relieved after five gruelling days of incessant battle, the gallant Fox Company had suffered 26 killed, 89 wounded, and three captured. This was almost exactly half of the 240 Marines who made up the reinforced company. By their efforts, the Marines of Company F assured the use of the road and facilitated the return of the two regiments to Hagaru later. They also helped win for Captain Barber, their commander, the Medal of Honor for their heroic stand under his brilliant leadership.

To recapitulate, Yudam-ni was attacked on the night of November 27th. After midnight, Company F at Toktong Pass came under assault. Before noon on the 28th the Marine Division was cut into four distinct segments; Yudam-ni, Toktong Pass, Hagaru-ri and Koto-ri. Each segment was isolated from the others by defended Chinese roadblocks.

In response to a directive from his division commander, the much decorated commanding officer of the 1st Marines, Colonel Lewis B. Puller, prepared to send a force north from Koto-ri to clear the main supply route. This was the only land route leading to Hagaru and Yudam-ni. The troops which cleared the route of Chinese roadblocks would also serve to reinforce the beleaguered garrison at Hagaru.

Attempts to clear the Hagaru-ri-Koto-ri main supply route proved fruitless on the 28th. Company D, 1st

Marines, moved north out of the Koto perimeter in the early afternoon. Within three hours Company F, 1st Marines, was ordered out to assist the first company which was hotly engaged only a mile from the perimeter. By dusk both companies were recalled; their withdrawal was covered by Marine close air support.

There was no through traffic on the Koto-Hagaru road on the 28th. Most attempts to traverse the road were turned back. One truck, driven by Corporal Frederick G. Holcomb of the 11th Marine Artillery Regiment, did not make it back. The truck's passenger, PFC Charles M. Kaylor, was a Marine reservist hitch-hiking a ride to Hungnam from whence he could embark for the United States and a dependency discharge which had just then been approved. When the two left Yudam-ni on the night of the 27th, they were part of the last convoy out of that perimeter before the general withdrawal in December. Their convoy negotiated Toktong Pass and arrived in Hagaru-ri without incident late the 27th. In an attempt to continue the trip south from Hagaru to Koto-ri on the 28th, the luckless Marines were captured by Chinese. These same Chinese were part of the force which even then was setting a trap for<sup>1</sup> the next convoy.

First Lieutenant Felix L. Ferranto, Radio Relay Platoon Commander of the Division Signal Battalion, departed Koto-ri at 7:30 A.M. on the 28th enroute to

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<sup>1</sup>Geer, pp. 269, 325.

Hagaru-ri. He drove alone and was captured after leaving the Koto-ri perimeter.<sup>1</sup>

While Holcomb, Kaylor, and Ferranto were being taken prisoner by the enemy, other Chinese were massing for an assault on the Hagaru perimeter. The Hagaru defenders anticipated their forthcoming ordeal, even to the time and place of the main attack. Intelligence agents and interrogator reports proved to be extremely accurate.<sup>2</sup> A Chinese division struck Hagaru beginning at about 10:30 P.M. November 28, 1950. They were beaten off after a night of vicious fighting and near success. They took no Marine prisoners; at least no Marines missing in that action were reported in any of the POW camps.

Colonel Puller's 1st Marines still had the job of opening the road and reinforcing Hagaru. At the same time they had their hands full defending the vital Koto-ri perimeter. Colonel Puller could spare only one rifle company of his own organic units to reinforce the Marines to the north. Clearly this was insufficient, particularly in light of the action fought by D and F Companies that same day. Therefore a composite unit was formed on November 28th consisting of personnel from ten different organizations.

The 41st Independent Commando, Royal Marines, had just arrived at Koto-ri enroute to Hagaru-ri, so its

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<sup>1</sup>1st SigBn., Unit Report No. 12, December 3, 1950, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>Montross and Canzona, III, 203-04.

commander, Lieutenant Colonel Douglas B. Drysdale, was assigned to lead the composite force which bore his name. Included in the make-shift unit were the 41st Commando of some 235 officers and men; about 205 U. S. Marines of Company G, 3d Battalion, 1st Marines; some 190 soldiers of Company B, 31st Infantry, 7th Infantry Division, of the Army; and about 82 additional U. S. Marines in the persons of postal clerks, truck drivers, military policemen, and communicators, plus several U. S. Navy hospital corpsmen attached to the 1st Marine Division. After commencing the move north, the task force was reinforced with 29 tanks, 76 vehicles and trailers, and 210 Marines from four different Marine units. Their arrival swelled the task force virtually to battalion size. The official Marine Corps history of the operation accounts for approximately 922 men, 141 vehicles and trailers, and the 29 tanks.<sup>1</sup> In spite of its impressive numerical total, the heterogeneous make-up of the unit rendered much of it ineffective as a fighting organization. This fact soon became evident.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 228.

<sup>2</sup>Except as noted the actions of Task Force Drysdale are derived from the following sources:

Letter from Capt Charles L. Harrison, USMC (Retired), July 24, 1960, captured with Task Force Drysdale while serving as a SSgt with an MP Detachment; and

Interview with Sgt Charles W. Dickerson, SSgt James B. Nash, TSgt Charles L. Harrison, Sgt Morris L. Estess, and Cpl Calvin W. Williams, by Historical Division, HQMC July 25-31, 1951, (filed as Dickerson interview, Interview File, G-3 Historical Branch Archives, HQMC); and 1st Mar Div, HistD, November, 1950, pp. 63-4; and Montross and Canzona, III, 225-35; and Geer, pp. 316-25.

Mist lay over the snow covered countryside when the point of Task Force Drysdale cleared Koto-ri perimeter at 9:45 A.M. on November 29. The commandos and the Marine rifle company were to fight their way in leapfrog-fashion through the Chinese positions while the remainder of the column followed in trucks on the road.

Slight resistance was encountered at the first objective a few hundred yards beyond Koto-ri. Resistance increased steadily thereafter, and progress was slow. The column inched its way northward, the constant halts and starts causing it to expand and contract like some giant human concertina. Chinese small-arms fire and mortar concentrations exacted a steady toll of casualties. To the men in trucks enemy action appeared to be minor harassing attacks of no particular consequence. Aside from the inconvenience of disembarking from their vehicles at each stop, which seemed to occur every 100 yards, the troops on the road experienced no great difficulty during the day. Jeeps shuttling the wounded back to the Koto-ri perimeter passed the rear elements of the convoy still moving out of Koto-ri.

Marine aviation provided close support attacks and helped fend off the Chinese along the route during daylight. At dusk the head of the column, which included most of the commandos, all of the Marine rifle company, and several tanks, pushed on to the village of Hagaru. Continuation of the move had been directed by division headquarters.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 1st MarDiv SAR, October-December, 1950, Annex C. p.64.

The positions at Hagaru were considered to be sufficiently in danger to warrant taking the calculated risk.

Progress of the center of the column was barred by a damaged truck, and Chinese small-arms and mortar fire prevented its removal. While the troops waited for the road to be cleared, the enemy severed that portion of the convoy stalled south of the roadblock. The rear elements of the task force spent the night fighting their way back into the perimeter they had left that afternoon. Communications had been lost because of weather, distance, terrain, and other circumstances, so neither the front nor the rear of the convoy realized that the center was isolated. The Chinese had succeeded in fractionalizing the column. Now began the final mastication. The gauntlet of fire, the vulnerability of the thin-skinned vehicles, and the actions of the troops were, in microcosm, almost identical with the misfortunes of the 2d Infantry Division on the road between Kunu-ri and Sunchon three days later.<sup>1</sup>

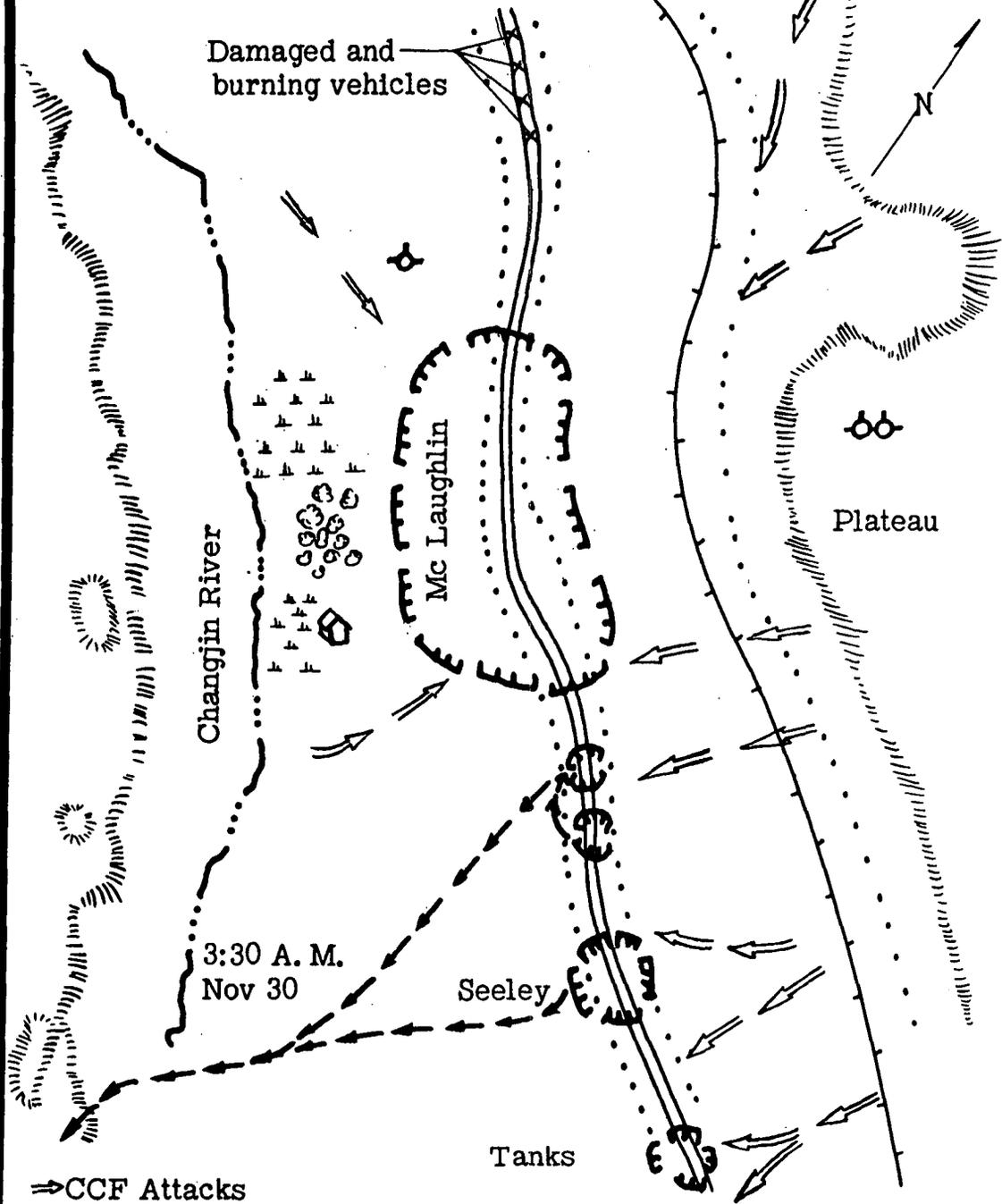
The center portion of the convoy was truly the most cosmopolitan of the three segments. Included were some commandos, most of the Army company, a Marine military police detachment, and Marines from several service and support units. To make matters even more complicated,

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<sup>1</sup> S. L. A. Marshall, CCF in the Attack (Part II), A Study Based on the Operations of 1st Marine Division in the Koto-ri, Hagaru-ri, Yudam-ni Area 20 November-10 December, 1950. Prepared by the Operations Research Office, the Johns Hopkins University, Far East Command, 1951, p. 4; and

S. L. A. Marshall, The River and the Gauntlet (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1953), pp. 261-360.

To Hagaru-ri



- ⇒ CCF Attacks
- ⊗ CCF Mortars
- ← Seeley's withdrawal
- ... Drainage ditches
- 🏠 House sheltering wounded after capture
- △ Rice paddies
- ⊙ Grove of trees

**TASK FORCE DRYSDALE AMBUSH**  
 November 29, 1950  
 All distances are approximate

100 0 100 200  
 Yards

MAP 5

two U. S. Marines were attached to the 41st Commando to provide transportation. The drivers, Corporal Joseph B. Harbin and Private First Class Uda G. Flanery, were from the 4.5" Rocket Battery, a Fleet Marine Force unit attached to the artillery regiment of the Marine division for operations in Korea. Harbin's truck was set on fire by the Chinese, and he found himself afoot with the isolated portion of the task force. Flanery returned to his parent unit on December 11th, having been with the advance elements of the task force, and he reported having seen the burning truck.<sup>1</sup> Harbin was captured in the ensuing action and spent almost three years as a prisoner of war.

The center portion of the task force came under increasingly heavy fire. The Chinese succeeded in splintering the group even further, reducing it to one large perimeter and three smaller positions. The northernmost and largest group contained about 130 to 140 men. Lieutenant Colonel Arthur A. Chidester, assistant Division G-4, was the senior officer with this group. He attempted to turn the stalled convoy around and return to Koto-ri, but the Chinese cut the column to his rear before the vehicles could be turned. Major James K. Eagan began to organize the southern part of Chidesters' group but was wounded in the legs and captured during a limited attack by the enemy. Lieutenant Colonel Chidester also received disabling wounds. Casualties mounted and bodies were

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<sup>1</sup>C Battery, 1st 4.5" Rocket Battalion, Fleet Marine Force, SAR, Appendix 5 to 11th Marines SAR, Annex SS to 1st MarDiv SAR, October-December, 1950, pp. 5-6.

stacked around the hastily formed perimeter. Freezing temperatures threatened to take an even greater toll. Army medical personnel travelling with the column tended the wounded even after their meager supplies gave out.

Reports of the action are garbled and often contradictory, particularly with respect to distances, personalities, and time factors. But in some matters there is virtually complete agreement. Major John N. McLaughlin assumed command of the ill-fated segment of Task Force Drysdale, and his courage and leadership are the central theme of its brief history.

Major McLaughlin's own case illustrates the diverse make-up of the group he organized. Like the author, he was an instructor with Mobile Training Team "A" from the Marine Troop Training Unit, Pacific, with headquarters at Coronado, California. The team was on temporary duty in Japan to provide amphibious instruction to units of the Eighth Army when the Korean War began. Together with other members of Team "Able", Major McLaughlin was ordered to the staff of the U. S. Tenth Corps. On November 29, 1950 it was his ill fortune to be travelling to Hagaru-ri in the capacity of liaison officer to the 1st Marine Division. He accompanied the only convoy scheduled to make the trip at that time. Initially his role was simply that of a passenger with the column. As November 29th faded into a new day, he assumed command of the battered center portion of the task force. Before November 30th was five hours old, he and his command were prisoners of the so-called Chinese Communist People's Volunteers.

Major McLaughlin, Warrant Officers Lloyd V. Dirst and Felix L. McCool, and several Marine noncommissioned officers organized the tattered elements of the convoy. They set personal examples of courage and leadership. The officers moved about in the open directing the defenders' fire. Royal Marine Commandos who remained with that portion of the column were as impressed with Major McLaughlin's leadership under fire as were the United States Marines.<sup>1</sup>

Casualties mounted. Ammunition dwindled and by 3:00 A.M. only about two clips or about sixteen cartridges remained per man. The temperature fell to 20 degrees below zero Fahrenheit. Shortly before dawn the Chinese demanded the surrender of the perimeter. By this time Warrant Officer Dirst had been seriously wounded as he strode about the perimeter. Staff Sergeant James B. Nash braved the intense enemy fire to drag the wounded officer to safety. For his act of gallantry the sergeant was later awarded the Silver Star medal. With about 40 dead, 40 able bodied and 40 wounded in dire need of shelter and medical care, and with ammunition now down to less than eight rounds per man, Major McLaughlin had no choice but to consider Chinese demands for the surrender of his hodgepodge agglomeration of soldiers, commandos, and Marines.

Through the medium of sign language and pidgeon English, the Chinese had arranged for a cease fire and

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<sup>1</sup>Letter from Warrant Officer Day, then a Quarter Master Sergeant, Instructor, Royal Marines (Retired), April, 14, 1960. Warrant Officer Day was captured in 1951 and eventually was confined in the same camp with Major McLaughlin.

consultation with the Marine leader to discuss possible surrender. During the parley between Major McLaughlin and the Chinese, most of the able-bodied men in the ditches stood on the road and walked up and down to restore their circulation. Army medical personnel continued ministering the wounded as best they could. Throughout the cease fire, the Chinese remained quiet and did not fire on the task force remnants even though some of the Americans, not knowing a cease fire had been arranged, fired occasional shots at the Chinese.

The three splinter-groups of Marines, commandos, and soldiers lying south of the main group took advantage of the lull in fighting by joining forces. Under the capable leadership of Major Henry J. Seeley, Division Motor Transport Officer, they gathered their wounded and slipped away to the west of the road. They ascended a steep mountain and wormed their way back to Koto-ri shortly after dawn.

When it became obvious that further resistance by the main party would be fruitless, and when the word was passed that surrender was imminent, most of the men remaining with Major McLaughlin rendered their weapons useless by throwing vital parts into the snow or by breaking the stocks of their rifles and carbines.

The Chinese had continued slipping in closer during the conversations, and when the surrender was agreed upon many CCF soldiers sprang to their feet from positions all around the perimeter and at distances as close as forty

feet.<sup>1</sup> The first Communist soldiers to enter the task force positions ignored their captives and immediately began to loot the vehicles. The troops who followed them surprised the Americans and British by their friendly attitude. They smiled, shook hands, and clapped their captives on the back. The only case of rough treatment reported was observed by one of the Marines, Corporal Calvin W. Williams. Williams, a headquarters postal clerk, was among a group of Marines freed six months later. He stated that one prisoner was sitting on a rock when a wounded Chinese soldier walked up and kicked him. Another Chinese intervened and prevented any further rough treatment.

Once the soldiers, commandos, and Marines were disarmed the Chinese permitted movement of some of the seriously wounded into the shelter of a nearby Korean house. They reneged on their promise to permit evacuation of the wounded to Koto-ri, but by allowing some to be sheltered in the house a few lives were saved. Warrant Officer Dirst was among those placed in the hut. He survived the ordeal although he remained unconscious for several days even after his eventual evacuation to a hospital ship. The wounded were picked up about eight days later when division elements fought their way south from Yudam-ni and Hagaru-ri to rejoin the Marines holding the Koto-ri

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<sup>1</sup>Commander, Naval Forces, Far East, Chinese Communist Treatment and Attempted Political Indoctrination of U. S. Marine Prisoners of War. (Mimeographed). July 11, 1951. Cited hereafter as ComNavFE Report of Chicom Indoctrination.

perimeter.

Shortly, the Chinese formed the prisoners into groups and marched them across the railroad tracks, onto the plateau east of the scene of carnage, and thence off into the mountainous countryside. The wounded received no medical treatment from the Chinese then or later.

The captured Army medical personnel provided what treatment they could. All day long on the 30th of November Chinese and United Nations' wounded straggled up into the hills. The Communists removed their own dead, carrying the bodies into the hills for burial.

Most of the prisoners were taken to a hidden depression in the mountains and ushered into one of two log huts. Some of the men had taken the precaution to slip a can or two of C rations into their parka pocket before capture. Consequently, most of them had some food during their first day of captivity.

The prisoners were searched but were permitted to keep most of their possessions except for knives, cigarette lighters, and matches. On the night of the 30th, they were allowed to have fires.

During interrogations, apparently conducted on the spot, the Marines were told that their division had been wiped out.<sup>1</sup> The enemy seemed intent on lowering their

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<sup>1</sup>It is doubtful that even the Chinese believed this lie because even then they were throwing wave after wave of soldiers against the 1st Marine Division in a futile attempt to destroy it. By early December the Communists spent almost three armies without achieving their goal

morale. Questions generally concerned the organization and weapons of the 1st Marine Division. At least two of their interrogators had been raised near the International Settlement in Shanghai, long the pre-World War II home of the 4th Marine Regiment. As a consequence, the interrogators were familiar with American customs and slang.

The prisoners were again formed up in column and marched off to the west towards the Pyongyang-Manpojin railroad. They numbered some 30 enlisted Marines, Major McLaughlin and three other Marine officers, 22 Royal Marines,<sup>1</sup> and roughly 70 American soldiers. From all appearances the Communist guards were provided by the sector through which the column was passing. When Koreans provided the guard, the treatment was noticeably rough. On several occasions Chinese guards intervened to protect the prisoners from the North Koreans.

There was virtually no opportunity for escape. Freezing weather, lack of food, and numerous Communist troop units in the vicinity in addition to the adequate guard discouraged any attempts to break away.

The prisoners made their way under guard along winding foot trails through the rugged terrain. They moved

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and without seriously hurting the Marine division, though it must be admitted that that the weather and their bullets did exact a higher than usual number of casualties in the ranks of the division.

<sup>1</sup>Marine Andrew M. Condron, a young Scot, was one of the 22 Royal Marines. He was the only Englishman and the only Marine of any nationality to refuse repatriation after the armistice. See Virginia Pasley Schmitz, 22 Stayed (London: W. H. Allen & Co., Ltd.), pp. 184-206.

either at night or during heavy snow storms, apparently to avoid detection by United Nations aircraft. The troops were on the verge of freezing and all were suffering from malnutrition.

A brief respite was provided when the column halted for several days. The officers were held in a Korean farm house from the 11th to the 22d of December. By this time Lieutenant Messman and Army Lieutenant George Shedd had joined the group.<sup>1</sup> A four day march brought the officers to Kanggye on December 26th. Other groups of prisoners filtered into Kanggye at about the same time.

Marine Sergeant R. J. Darden never completed the trip. Exhausted, stricken with pneumonia, he died en route. A second Marine Sergeant, R. P. Frazure, and Private First Class Edwin P. Ogradnik succumbed to the dual complications of dysentery and pneumonia shortly after arrival at Kanggye.<sup>2</sup> Proper care and diet could have prevented all three deaths. They were not the sole casualties of the march. Several of the soldiers died as well.

Kanggye offered some shelter from icy winds, and it meant also the end of the terrible trek northward. Food, such as it was, appeared more regularly than it had on the march. And something else appeared, too. The prisoners encountered the "Lenient Policy" of the Chinese.

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<sup>1</sup>Letter from CWO 3 Felix J. McCool, USMC (Retired), February 3, 1961.

<sup>2</sup>Letter from Master Sergeant William Pettit, FMCR, February 3, 1961; and  
Letter from First Sergeant Chester A. Mathis, FMCR, January 3, 1961.

## CHAPTER III

### BREAKOUT

As Task Force Drysdale was beginning its ordeal, the Marine Division Commander, Major General Oliver P. Smith, took action to regroup his widely separated forces. He ordered a redeployment which would assure him greater cohesion. At 3:45 P.M., November 29, 1950, General Smith directed the 5th Marines to protect the Yudam-ni area and the 7th Marines, in its entirety, to clear the main supply route to Hagaru. The two regiments and their supporting units regrouped on the 30th. On December 1st the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, struck out across country to fight through to relieve Company F at Toktong Pass. Artillerymen of the 4th Battalion, 11th Marines, were formed into provisional infantry platoons. The dead were given a field burial at Yudam-ni; truck spaces were needed for casualties expected during the fight southward.<sup>1</sup>

Three battalions remained in position overlooking Yudam-ni. They were to hold that crucial terrain until all other elements cleared the area and were safely en

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<sup>1</sup>Montross and Canzona, III, fn p. 255 relates that the remains of those buried at Yudam-ni were returned to the United States for burial after the armistice.

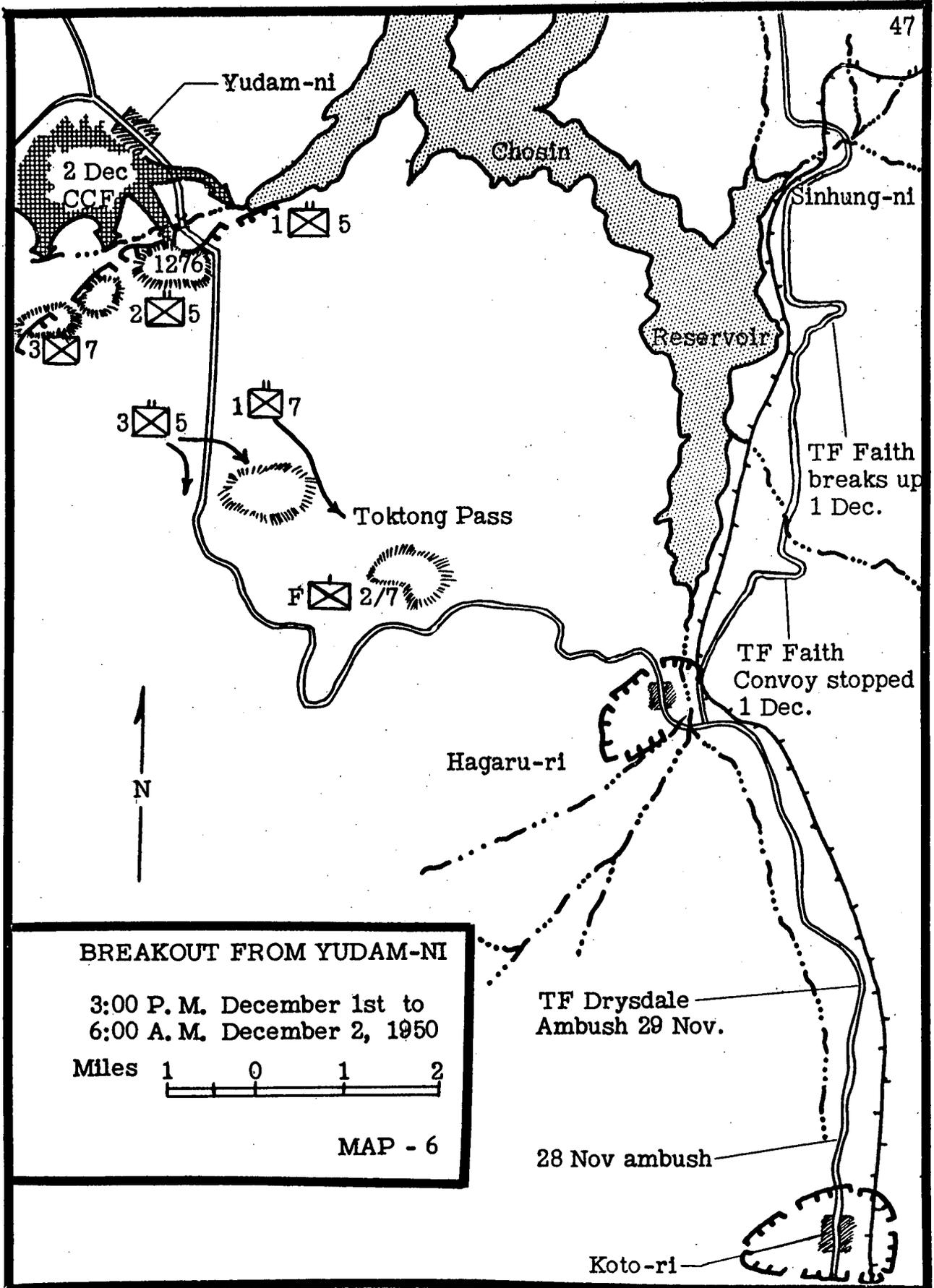
route to Hagaru. The 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, led the attack south along the road generally parallel to 1/7 which moved across country.<sup>1</sup> The two leading battalions were masked from each other by the precipitous terrain.

The 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, which had been attacking south with two companies in the van, held up shortly after dark. As midnight approached, the Marine attack was pressed again with Companies H on the right and I on the left. Company I, 3/5 met severe resistance from Chinese dug in on hill 1520 and was forced to fall back to its original positions from which it could protect the supply route better. The Chinese followed up their advantage by pressing home repeated attacks in estimated battalion strength and by concentrating heavy mortar fires on the company positions. PFC Edward G. Wilkins, Jr. was captured by the enemy during the hotly contested battle. By morning's light on the 2d only about 20 of the Marines from I/3/5 were able to continue fighting. They were combined into one platoon and attached to Company G, 5th Marines.<sup>2</sup> The Chinese left 342 bodies of their "Volunteers"

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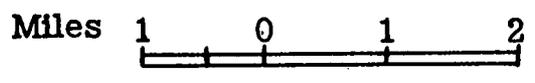
<sup>1</sup>For the sake of brevity and variety unit designations may hereafter be shown in abbreviated form. For example A/1/7 indicates Company A, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines; 2/1 refers to the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines. During the Korean War, Marine infantry battalions included three lettered rifle companies and one weapons company. Companies A, B, and C were always in the 1st Battalion, Companies D, E, and F were in the 2d Battalion, and Companies G, H, and I were in the 3d Battalion. Weapons companies (W/3/5 for example) provided mortar, machine gun and rocket support in each battalion.

<sup>2</sup>3d Battalion, 5th Marines, SAR, Annex C to 5th Marines SAR, Annex QQ to 1st MarDiv SAR, October-December, 1950, pp. 15-16.



**BREAKOUT FROM YUDAM-NI**

3:00 P.M. December 1st to  
6:00 A.M. December 2, 1950



MAP - 6

stacked around the Company I perimeter. How many additional Chinese were wounded is pure conjecture.

The covering force of three battalions which had remained at Yudam-ni faced the difficult task of fending off the enemy, trying to break contact, and then defending the rear of the entire division as it moved south. Company F, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, in particular came under heavy attack on hill 1276.<sup>1</sup> The Chinese began closing in on F/2/5 in the early morning hours of December 2d. Leading elements crawled close to the Marine foxholes. A sudden fusillade of grenades signalled the assault, and the Communist troops rose to their feet to charge the Company F defenders. The attackers struck in an inverted "v".

The rifle squad led by Sergeant Donald M. Griffith was deployed well forward and received the initial brunt of the enemy attack. A grenade exploded directly in front of Sergeant Griffith's foxhole. The fragments tore a deep wound in his nose, blinded his right eye, and punctured one of his legs. The sergeant was unconscious for a short while. When he regained his senses, he found his squad had been overrun and the other two squads of his platoon had been forced to pull back within effective supporting distance of the remainder of the company.

Aided by illuminating shells fired by F Company's organic mortars, Marine night-fighter aircraft strafed

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., and Montross and Canzona, III, 265-66.

the attacking Chinese. The welcome air support helped stop the onslaught, but it was too late to be of assistance to Sergeant Griffith. He had been bypassed when the first waves of Chinese swept by his hole. The Marine sergeant found his M-1 rifle useless because the firing pin had snapped in the extreme cold. His sole weapons then consisted of two hand grenades, and he succeeded in throwing both of them before he was detected.<sup>1</sup>

An enemy soldier jumped into the foxhole, and Sergeant Griffith leaped to his feet. The Chinaman screamed and several of his comrades joined him in taking the wounded Marine prisoner. While being led down the hill north of his original position, Sergeant Griffith was joined by two other members of his squad who had also been taken prisoner. They were Privates First Class Paul E. and Donald F. Dowling. Neither of the young brothers was wounded.

The three captives were taken north along precipitous mountain trails and through icy streams. Their march continued unabated for three days and nights. Approximately every eight hours their guards were changed for a fresh group, but the prisoners were forced to continue marching without rest. They were given neither food nor water for three days. Occasionally the Marines scooped up chunks of snow in an effort to quench their thirsts.

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<sup>1</sup>Except where otherwise noted, this section is derived from a letter from Staff Sergeant Donald M. Griffith, U. S. Marine Corps (Retired), November 8, 1960.

At one point during the march, Sergeant Griffith suffered so intensely from hunger, thirst, cold, fatigue and pain from his several wounds that he almost lost the will to go on. He fell to the ground and motioned to one of the Chinese guards to shoot. The Dowling brothers intervened and somehow convinced the Chinese that the three prisoners required some rest before continuing the march. Next they offered to carry their squad leader in spite of their own fatigue. Their selfless concern provided the spark Griffith needed. After a few minutes rest when the Chinese guards ordered them to press on, Sergeant Griffith was able to continue.

At the end of three days of continuous marching they entered a small Korean village located in a deep valley. The mud huts of the village housed large numbers of wounded prisoners of war. Those who were able to travel were taken on to other camps without delay. The sick and wounded were placed in already overcrowded huts, ostensibly to recuperate. If they were lucky, they recovered and were transferred to a regular camp. Sergeant Griffith stayed at the separation center for about four months. The Dowling brothers were transferred from the valley almost immediately. Griffith never saw them again although he heard later that one brother died of pneumonia and the other died shortly thereafter of unknown causes.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Evidence from recovered POWs established the deaths of the two brothers while in enemy hands.

Meanwhile the 5th and 7th Marine Regiments continued their fight southward towards Hagaru-ri. The two regiments began entering the Hagaru perimeter late on December 3d. By 2:00 P.M. on the 4th, the rearmost elements arrived in the town. The severity of the action is indicated by the casualties; roughly 1,000 Marines were wounded and some 500 suffered frostbite from the 16-degrees-below-zero weather.<sup>1</sup>

As division units closed on Hagaru, the first requirement was to consolidate forces. Casualties had to be evacuated from the small hastily constructed airstrip. Replacements were needed, and they had to be integrated into combat units without delay for the fight south to Koto-ri and eventually to the port of Hungnam.

During the first five days of December approximately 3150 U. S. Marine, 1137 Army and 25 Royal Marine casualties were evacuated from Hagaru by Marine and Air Force transport planes, and some 537 Marine replacements were flown in on the return trips of many of the aircraft.<sup>2</sup> The replacements were drawn from hospitals in Japan where they had been recuperating from wounds received previously. The troops were given a one day respite before continuing the attack southward.

Hagaru perimeter had received only minor attention from the Chinese after the initial onslaught on November

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<sup>1</sup>Montross and Canzona, III, 259, 275.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 279.

29th. The fortunate lull in fighting had enabled Marine engineers within the perimeter to hack out the 3,200 foot airstrip which made casualty evacuation possible.

The Chosin Reservoir Campaign furnished one episode which illustrates the unfathomable nature of the Chinese.<sup>1</sup> Task Force Faith, an Army unit composed of two infantry battalions and an artillery battalion, was isolated at Sinhung-ni on the east shore of the Chosin Reservoir. These were the units which had relieved the 5th Marines in that same area a week earlier. The Task Force numbered some 2,500 troops including a large proportion of Korean soldiers. On December 1st the Task Force commander, Lieutenant Colonel Don C. Faith, U. S. Army, decided to fight south to Hagaru. His 500 wounded were placed on trucks and the force began the slow, painful trek in face of mounting opposition. At dusk, when the unit was only four and a half miles from its destination, Lieutenant Colonel Faith received fatal wounds. With his death the Task Force lost all cohesion. By darkness on the following day, an estimated 1050 survivors of the original 2,500 troops had either wandered into Marine lines or had been rescued by troops under the direction of Lieutenant Colonel Olin C. Beall, U. S. Marine Corps. Marine patrols found

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<sup>1</sup>Except where otherwise noted, this section is derived from the following sources:

1st Motor Transport Battalion, 1st Marine Division, Historical Diary, December, 1950. Cited hereafter as 1st MT Bn HistD; and

Montross and Canzona, III, 244; and Geer, pp. 345-46.

more than 300 bodies in the abandoned trucks of the Task Force. Many of the soldiers had been killed by Chinese grenades as they lay helpless in the trucks. Hundreds others were missing in action, and many were held by the enemy as prisoners.

In direct contrast to the slaughter of the seriously wounded, the Chinese did not materially hinder rescue operations of most of the stragglers and walking wounded. In some instances they even assisted the Marines in evacuating the Army survivors. Conversely one group of four soldiers which had been held captive by the Chinese for several days received more brutal treatment. Two enemy soldiers took them from the hut where they had been kept and led them onto the ice of the reservoir, ostensibly to release them. As the Americans began to walk away, the Chinese opened fire and shot their legs from under them. All four were badly wounded. They were rescued later by Lieutenant Colonel Beall.<sup>1</sup>

The Marine breakout from Hagaru to Koto-ri took place on the 6th and 7th of December, 1950. Approximately 10,000 troops and more than 1,000 vehicles made the 11-mile trip in 38 hours.<sup>2</sup> As had been anticipated, enemy resistance was light during daylight hours when Marine air support provided a protective umbrella over the mass of foot troops. At night the Chinese closed in and resistance

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<sup>1</sup>1st MT Bn., HistD, December, 1950, p. 3; and Geer, p. 345.

<sup>2</sup>Montross and Canzona, III, 303.

increased markedly. Division Headquarters Company formed "Charlie" Serial of the Division Train, and when the scene of the November 28th ambush was reached, Headquarters personnel were able to identify several of their comrades who had been slain at that site.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast to Communist treatment of prisoners, the Marines left their seriously wounded Chinese prisoners behind at Hagaru. The Communist sick and wounded were provided with shelter, food, and fuel before the Marines departed and only about 160 able-bodied POW's were taken southward to Koto-ri. During a fight, the Chinese attackers poured a heavy volume of fire into the prisoner group huddled in the middle of a road. When some of the POW's tried to escape, the Marines also fired on them. Only 13 of the original 160 survived.<sup>2</sup>

The two-day movement from Hagaru to Koto-ri cost the 1st Marine Division 103 killed, 506 wounded, and 7 missing in action. Of the latter, four were captured by the enemy while on a northbound convoy en route from Hamhung to Chinhung-ni on December 6th. Their 15-truck convoy was returning to Chinhung-ni through what was presumed to be fairly safe territory. Instead the Chinese sprang an am-

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<sup>1</sup>Interview of Major Frederick Simpson, U. S. Marine Corps, by Captain Kenneth A. Shutts, U. S. Marine Corps Reserve, at the 1st Marine Division Command Post (Forward), Chunchon, Korea, April 11, 1951. Filed with 1st Provisional Historical Platoon Interviews - April 17, 1951 #1, in G-3 Historical Branch Archives, HQMC.

<sup>2</sup>Montross and Canzona, III, 299.

bush and destroyed four trucks. The convoy leader and six enlisted Marines were killed, three enlisted were wounded, and four reported missing in action, were captured.<sup>1</sup> Of those captured, Corporal James P. McInerney, PFC Charles A. Boulduc, and PFC Lloyd E. Osborne were returned to military control by the communists in 1953. PFC Billy W. Baker is presumed to have died while a POW.<sup>2</sup> The following day the parent unit, Company A, 1st Motor Transport Battalion, sent a patrol out which successfully recovered the 11 trucks that had escaped destruction.

Regroupment of division elements at Koto-ri had not been physically completed before orders were issued to continue the attack south.<sup>3</sup> But now the bulk of the 1st Marine Division was joined together. The records indicate that the division numbered approximately 11,686 U. S. Marines, 2,353 U. S. Army personnel, 150 Royal Marines, and 40 ROK Police. Again, all seriously wounded were evacuated by air.

The 1st Marine Regiment held Koto-ri while the balance of the division departed that perimeter en route to Chinhung-ni and thence Hungnam. On the afternoon of the 10th a 17-truck detachment from Company A, 7th Motor Transport Battalion, Fleet Marine Force, departed Koto-ri for Hamhung. An hour before midnight the trucks reached

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<sup>1</sup>1st MT 'Bn, HistD, December, 1950, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup>USMC Casualties.

<sup>3</sup>1st MarDiv OpnO 26-50.

Sudong. In spite of daytime reconnaissance by an Army patrol, the enemy slipped into Sudong and prepared an ambush. When the A/7 MT Bn trucks approached, the Chinese sprang their trap. Seven trucks were destroyed and the convoy was unable to proceed. One Marine was killed in the exchange of fire and three were wounded. Three more were captured by the enemy. They were Sergeant Paul M. Manor and PFC Paul Phillips, Jr., both of whom gained their freedom five months later, and Corporal Billy G. Fields who died in captivity.<sup>1</sup>

The Division Commander, Major General Oliver P. Smith, had directed that the division tanks were to come out after the last regimental train.<sup>2</sup> Obviously the tragic lessons of Task Force Drysdale and of the 2d Division, Eighth U. S. Army, had been learned. Thin-skinned, wheeled vehicles cannot bypass stalled tanks on single-lane mountain roads nor can they withstand intense small-arms fire. Hence the trucks and jeeps were to precede the iron monsters. There can be little doubt that the decision was wise. At about 1:00 A.M. December 11, one of the tanks suffered a frozen brake.<sup>3</sup> Thirty-one tanks preceding the cripple trundled on south. Eight tanks of the 2d Platoon in the rear were forced to halt. The stalled tanks and

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<sup>1</sup>7th Motor Transport Battalion, Fleet Marine Force SAR, Annex VV to 1st MarDiv SAR, October-December, 1950; and

"USMC Casualties".

<sup>2</sup>Commanding General, 1st Marine Division, letter dated December 9, 1950, cited by Montross and Canzona, III, 328.

<sup>3</sup>Geer, p. 371.

their security, a 28-man platoon from the Division Reconnaissance Company, formed the tail end of the Marine column though an alien column followed them. Korean refugees were close behind the rear point and Chinese soldiers sneaked into the refugee column. They kept approaching the last tank.<sup>1</sup>

Radio communications were impeded by the rugged terrain, and the last tank in the column was unable to communicate with other elements of the platoon by radio. The commander of the last tank, Sergeant Robert J. Dolby, left his four crewmen and moved forward on foot to report that he was under attack and needed help. In the meantime, the platoon commander of the 1st Platoon who was in the van of Company B, 1st Tank Battalion, raised the last tank on his radio and after learning of their problem he advised them to abandon their tank.<sup>2</sup> Whether they ignored the instructions or were unable to carry them out is not clear. Shortly thereafter Sergeant Dolby reached his platoon commander and advised him of the situation. The platoon commander, First Lieutenant Philip H. Ronzone, then issued orders similar to what Lerond had already sent by radio, "Abandon tank!" Again the crew inside hull

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<sup>1</sup>Except where noted otherwise, this section is derived from the following sources:

Montross and Canzona, III, 328-31; and Geer, p. 371.

<sup>2</sup>Statement of First Lieutenant Jack M. Lerond, 047793, USMC, enclosure to letter from the Commanding Officer, 1st Tk Bn, 1st MarDiv, to CMC, serial 1123 of December 27, 1950.

number 22 did not comply.<sup>1</sup> Dolby tried to return to his tank but the Chinese were even then closing in on the rear point.

The Chinese finally attacked the rear of the column and after a sharp fight they drove the foot Marines back beyond the rearmost tank.<sup>2</sup> Two wounded Marines from the Reconnaissance Platoon had been placed under that tank when the fight first started. The Reconnaissance Platoon commander, four Marines and a Navy Hospital Corpsman attempted to rescue the two wounded Marines and the tank crewmen who were still inside the buttoned-up tank. The rescue attempt failed because of intense small-arms fire and grenades. Two of the would-be rescuers were wounded. By this time most of the tank crews had abandoned their tanks and continued south on foot. The enemy climbed onto the rear tank and set fire to it. The second last tank had already been abandoned. The crew inside number 22 kept their hatches closed and ignored the Reconnaissance Company Marines who repeatedly beat on the hull in an effort to communicate and coax them out to safety.

When the action was completed and noses were counted, the crewmen of the last tank were declared missing and presumed dead. The tankers were Corporals Andrew Aguirre, Joe E. Saxon and J. E. Glasgow and Private First Class

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., Statement of First Lieutenant Philip H. Ronzone, 048019, USMC.

<sup>2</sup>1st Marines, SAR, Annex PP to 1st MarDiv SAR, October-December, 1950, p. 26.

Nick Antonis. As it turned out all four were captured by the enemy and only Glasgow failed to survive the two and three quarter years of captivity.

The following morning Marine planes destroyed the abandoned tanks.<sup>1</sup>

Tenth Corps Operation Order 10-50 directed the 1st Marine Division to begin embarkation in Hungnam immediately. The U. S. Army 3d and 7th Divisions defended the Hungnam perimeter against minor enemy patrol activities while the Marines loaded their ships and prepared to redeploy to South Korea where they were to fight for two and a half years longer. Marine Aircraft Groups joined with Navy and Air Force units to fend off hostile units near the port city.

On December 14, 1950, the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing shut down operations and departed for Japan. The next day the last of the major Marine ground units set sail. The first half year of the war closed.

The severe combat had proved costly. Since landing at Wonsan in October approximately 728 Marines had been killed in action or died of wounds, 3508 were wounded in action, and 192 were missing. Later events showed that roughly one third of the missing had been captured. They included Captain Booker, ten ground officers of whom two, Lieutenant Colonel Chidester and Major Eagan, are presumed to have died shortly after capture, and 68 enlisted ground Marines of whom 50 survived.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Montross and Canzona, III, 351.

<sup>2</sup>USMC Casualties.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE LENIENT POLICY

The North Koreans treated their prisoners cruelly, but their brutality was physical. The Chinese introduced a more insidious form of cruelty. With them physical violence was less general but more purposeful, and it was liberally spiced with mental pressure. The North Koreans made token efforts to extract military information from their prisoners taking more pleasure in maltreating than in exploiting them. The Chinese Communists were more effective in their intelligence activities. In addition they made an intensive effort to indoctrinate their prisoners of war or to gain a propaganda advantage. The prisoner of war camp system was designed to support Chinese aims for control and use of POW's, and they called it the "Lenient Policy".

The Communist prisoner of war camps developed under Chinese direction beginning in late December, 1950. In the first three months of 1951 a network of camps was created along the southern shores of the Yalu River. For this purpose Korean residents of selected villages were evacuated, and the POW's were moved in. Personnel captured in the Chosin Reservoir campaign and those taken in north-

western Korea were the first to encounter the lenient policy. Simply stated, this meant calculated leniency in return for co-operation, harassment in return for neutrality, and brutality in return for resistance.

To trace the movements of all the individual prisoners would be hopelessly confusing, yet not all of the Marines captured during the Chosin Reservoir campaign shared the same problems or experiences. Nor did all of the Marines face their problems or attempt to solve them in exactly the same manner. This period in the Korean War furnishes a pattern surprisingly different from all later periods in many respects. Thus it becomes necessary to recount the activities at Kanggye and the ultimate destination of the three major groups formed when that camp was abandoned. Of equal importance to this paper is the role that The Valley served in the Chinese scheme of things.<sup>1</sup> The evolution of the Chinese POW Camp system had its origin in Kanggye and The Valley, and Chinese indoctrination techniques inherited from the Soviets began to undergo subtle refinements as the Chinese gained experience with American prisoners of war. The Americans and other United Nations prisoners of war gained experience, too.

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<sup>1</sup>Great Britain, Ministry of Defence, Treatment of British Prisoners of War in Korea (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1955), Cited hereafter as British POW Report.

The Valley was a temporary collection point and medical processing center located near Kanggye. This report refers to The Valley. Sergeant Griffith refers to the same camp as Death Valley, but the latter term is more often applied to a valley near Pukchon.

Between the 20th and 26th of December, 1950, small groups of exhausted United Nations POW's trickled in to Kanggye until the total swelled to 290. This number included 235 soldiers, mainly from the U. S. 7th Division's Task Force Faith, 36 U. S. Marines, 18 Royal Marine Commandos, and one sailor,<sup>1</sup> a U. S. Navy hospital corpsman who had been attached to the 1st Marine Division. The camp, generally referred to as Kanggye, was located about eight miles north of the village of Kanggye.<sup>2</sup>

The camp commander had a small staff of Chinese who worked directly for him and assisted in administering the two POW companies. The staff included about 15 interpreters and 15 administrative aides in addition to half a dozen medical personnel, several cooks, and over 100 guards. It is apparent from interviews with returnees that the administrative aides were charged with political instruction and indoctrination of the prisoners.

The Chinese made no attempt to segregate the officers from the enlisted personnel. Although the officers were grouped into one squad, they were interned in the same

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<sup>1</sup>Hospitalman 3d Class Herman Castle.

<sup>2</sup>Except as otherwise noted the information concerning Kanggye is derived from the following sources:

ComNavFE Report of Chicom Indoctrination; and  
Letter from Lieutenant Colonel William G. Thrash, USMC to the Commandant, U. S. Marine Corps, dated December 9, 1953; subject, Exemplary conduct, case of Major John N. McLaughlin, 08423 USMC, Report of and Recommendations of award for. Cited hereafter as Thrash letter to CMC.; and  
Harold H. Martin, "They Tried To Make Our Marines Love Stalin", The Saturday Evening Post, August 25, 1951, pp. 25, 107-109; and  
Harrison, McCool, and Mathis letters.

area and had occasional contact with the enlisted prisoners. The squads contained from eight to twelve men each depending on the size of the room to which they were assigned. The squad leaders were appointed by the Chinese who selected prisoners appearing to be more co-operative or "progressive" as they termed it. By Communist definition a "progressive" was one who co-operated with them and at least appeared to accept the Communist viewpoint. A "reactionary" was a prisoner who resisted indoctrination efforts.

Major McLaughlin was the senior officer among the prisoners, and in direct opposition to his captors he began the task of establishing communications between the small scattered groups. By so doing, he sought to maintain effective control of the POW's and to present a united front against the enemy. Because the 290 United Nations personnel were scattered throughout several farmhouses, it was extremely difficult to create any really effective organization. Every few days, however, the prisoners were brought together in a large barn where they were required to listen to a Chinese indoctrinator. It was at the mass meetings that the major was able to issue instructions, advice and encouragement to the enlisted prisoners. The cold, smoke-filled barn was the locale for widespread exchange of information between the many little groups.

McLaughlin issued instructions to the enlisted personnel through five Marine noncommissioned officers,

Technical Sergeants Albert J. Roberts and Robert J. Pettit, Staff Sergeant Charles L. Harrison, and Corporals Theodore R. Wheeler and Leonard J. Maffioli. The Marines made a conscious effort to stick together, and they achieved some measure of success.

As part of their lenient policy, the Chinese informed the POW's that they were not angry with them for being in Korea, that they realized the Americans and others had been duped by warmongers and Wall Street imperialists. They assured the prisoners that treatment would be fair and lenient, but that wrongdoers would be publicly criticized and made to stand at attention for long periods. On Christmas Eve the Chinese decorated the barn with wreaths, candles, two Christmas trees, red paper bells, and a sign bearing the cheerful inscription, "Merry Christmas." Two huge placards also decorated the barn; they read:

If it were not for the Wall Street Imperialists  
you would be home with your wives and families  
on this Christmas night.

Who is responsible for your being away from your  
wives and families at this Christmas time? We  
too want to be with our families.

Within a week after arrival at Kanggye, the lenient policy manifested itself in still another way. Several of the prisoners managed to write letters home. The Chinese mailed at least some of them, and several letters were received by the prisoners' families within two months of mailing. In one case PFC Charles M. Kaylor wrote to his wife in January, 1951, and she received the letter in

Minneapolis, Minnesota, in March, 1951.<sup>1</sup>

The daily routine was boring though not particularly arduous. Prisoners arose at 7:00 A.M. and either took a short walk or performed light calisthenics. They washed their faces and hands, and at 8:00 A.M. representatives from each squad drew the appropriate number of rations from the kitchen. Food was cooked by the Chinese, and the diet was essentially the same as that provided the Communist soldiers consisting of singular items such as sorghum seed, bean curd, soya bean flour, dikons, or cracked corn and on certain special occasions such as Christmas and Lunar New Year the prisoners received small portions of rice, boiled fatty pork, candy and peanuts. The prisoners were told that they were being fed because the Chinese were good; no reference was made to international agreements or the responsibilities of captors for their captives; they were fed simply because the Chinese were good.

After breakfast the prisoners were either marched to the barn which served as a communal lecture hall or they were required to conduct informal political discussions within their own huts. Squad leaders were held responsible for proper discussions by their squads of assigned topics in Marxian dialectical materialism. There seems to have been little or no direct organized opposition to the indoctrination; indeed there seems to have been little

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<sup>1</sup>The Minneapolis Star, May 26, 1951, p. 1.

opportunity for it since study periods were mandatory; the POW's did not have the option of refusing to attend or to participate in lectures and discussions.

On rare days a noon meal was served, although frequently only two meals were prepared and the noon meal was omitted. After an hour set aside for resting, the afternoon lecture or discussion began and lasted for two hours. The supper meal was generally served at 5:00 P.M. when camp housekeeping details were completed. The prisoners retired at about 7:00 P.M. Holiday routine prevailed only on Christmas, New Years, and Lunar New Year so that Saturdays and Sundays passed like any other day. It is evident from the carefully established routine that the Chinese wanted the POW's to concentrate on their enforced studies. The curriculum was more intensive than most college courses. From the reports of other camps the treatment of most POW's at Kanggye was less brutal than that accorded any group of prisoners during this period. Yet this leniency was coldly calculated to neutralize possible resisters and to convert those who could be bent to the Communists' will. At the same time, when viewed objectively, many of the United Nations personnel at Kanggye were comparatively well treated and were fed as well as their captors, although all of the prisoners were suffering varying degrees of malnutrition from lack of a properly balanced diet.

Chinese doctors provided medications of a far lower standard than would be found in a normal field-first-aid station. Aspirin or APC pills were a common remedy; the

next most common service seems to have been removing black, frozen toes without sedation. Some of the sickest personnel disappeared from camp; those who remained were told the others were en route to a hospital.<sup>1</sup>

In January Sergeant Robert J. Coffee and Corporal R. L. Wegner were among those taken away from Kanggye to the so-called Chinese hospital. Wegner had been wounded, and Coffee was suffering, among other ailments, from frozen feet.<sup>2</sup> Two others, Technical Sergeant Donald M. Duncan and Corporal Billy G. Fields were removed from Kanggye at about the same time. Duncan was suffering from wounds and Fields had acute dysentery.<sup>3</sup> Sergeant Coffee was the only one of the four who survived.<sup>4</sup> The Chinese hospital seems to have been a primitive collection of mud and wattle huts in a nearby valley, possibly the same valley in which Sergeant Griffith was being held.

Later, probably in February, several sick POW's were loaded on ox-carts ostensibly for movement to a hospital. One of the prisoners, Technical Sergeant Pettit, related that the sick Americans were told they were being taken to a place where there was a large hospital with beds, doctors and nurses. The small caravan of ox-carts departed

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<sup>1</sup>Pettit letter.

<sup>2</sup>Letter from CG, 1st MarDiv to CMC, serial 23448 of May 31, 1951; enclosure 10, statement of Sergeant Morris L. Estess.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., enclosure 11, statement of Sergeant Paul M. Manor and PFC Charles E. Quiring.

<sup>4</sup>USMC Casualties.

from Kanggye at midnight, but instead of taking the POW's to a hospital the Chinese turned them over to North Korean Police. According to Pettit, the sick died like flies.<sup>1</sup> The Chinese resumed control over the group for about two weeks, but then the POW's were remanded to the custody of Korean police again. Finally in May, 1951, the survivors were turned over to the Chinese at Camp 1, Chongsong.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, those who remained at Kanggye were exposed to the continuing indoctrination program of the Chinese. At the very outset the POW's were informed that the most progressive among them would be taken south to the front lines and released. This announcement was undoubtedly made to foster co-operation, and it succeeded, at least to the extent that many prisoners vied with each other to make speeches and to produce articles suitable for the camp newspaper. Successful authors received cigarettes as a reward for their literary efforts, courtesy of the Chinese People's Volunteers. The paper, "New Life", consisted generally of one or two pages which reproduced the hand-printed articles written by the prisoners. Six issues were produced during January, 1951, and five of the 30 articles printed were written by Marines. By their own admission the Chinese were able to secure contributions of articles from only a small percentage of the prisoners, though any contributions represented a victory

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<sup>1</sup>Pettit letter.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

for the Communists.

The following article is illustrative of the type which was suitable to the Communists and was published in the camp newspaper. Entitled "We Were Paid Killers", this article, written by a Marine PFC in the 4th Squad, 2d Company, appeared in the fifth edition of "New Life" published on January 22, 1951 at Kanggye, and the text read as follows:

Since I was liberated, I've been given time to just think and analyze this Korean problem. Often I've asked myself "Were we paid Killers?" "Are these Korean people really our enemy?" "Why am I here?" These questions have brought me to the conclusion that the American capitalists have made us nothing short of "paid killers." But we were ignorant of the fact and we followed the capitalists without asking ourselves "Why?" I am sure none of us would kill a fellow American in cold blood. But we have killed these innocent people just because MacArthur and Truman said, "they are our enemy." In reality they are a peace loving people and it is only the capitalists lust for more power and money that had caused bloodshed. And we were the cannon fodder for their willful desires. But now we are enlightened to these facts. I believe none of us will be fooled again.<sup>1</sup>

The young author of "We Were Paid Killers" did not serve the Communists' purpose for long. He became an aggressive reactionary and on several occasions was put in solitary confinement in rat-infested holes. He never fully regained the trust of his fellow captives, however, even though he had become "a red hot reactionary."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>ComNavFE Report of Chicom Indoctrination.

<sup>2</sup>Major Gerald Fink, U. S. Marine Corps, MS comments.

The articles written at Kanggye by other Marines and by other prisoners of war were of a similar tenor, and President Truman, General MacArthur and Secretary of State Acheson came under heavy attack in several of the articles. Clearly the authors went far beyond doctrinal teachings in the Marine Corps and other services which require that a POW give no more than name, rank, service number, and date of birth.

Peace was the basic theme demanded by the Communists, and it served as a front to hide their true motives. The Soviets had set the stage at the close of World War II when, through fraud, coercion, deception and the use of German collaborators, they compiled large numbers of signatures on various peace petitions which then received wide circulation. A U. S. Senate subcommittee investigating Communist exploitation of American prisoners concluded that the Chinese made extensive use of Soviet methods after adding a few refinements of their own.<sup>1</sup>

Just prior to the outbreak of hostilities in Korea, the Communist World Peace Committee held an international meeting in Stockholm and introduced what has come to be known as the "Stockholm Peace Appeal". In commenting on

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<sup>1</sup>U. S. Congress, Senate, Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations of the Committee on Government Operations, Hearings on Communist Interrogation, Indoctrination and Exploitation of American Military and Civilian Prisoners, Report No. 2832, 84th Cong., 2d Sess., 1957, p. 2. Cited hereafter as Senate Subcommittee on Investigations POW Hearings. Report No. 2832.

the meeting and the resultant "Appeal", the Swedish Prime Minister, the Honorable Tage Erlander, said on July 16, 1950, "It is with feelings of disgust that we in Sweden witness the brandishing of the name of our capital in international Communist propaganda".<sup>1</sup> The Stockholm Peace Appeal was later circulated throughout many of the POW Camps in North Korea, and Kanggye was the first camp in which this particular petition was circulated. In February, 1951, the first peace committee in the prison camps was organized at Kanggye. A Deputy Director of Cultural Affairs submitted an article to "New Life" congratulating those prisoners who had elected to send a petition to the United Nations Organization pressing for a "true peace".<sup>2</sup> This would indicate that sometime within a month after the arrival of the first group on December 20th some of the prisoners had either agreed to sign or had been coerced into signing a peace appeal.

The Stockholm Peace Appeal served the Chinese Communists in two ways. They scored a propaganda victory whenever any U. N. prisoners of war signed the appeal thus adding weight to their propaganda campaign. Less obvious but of deeper significance was the basic tenet of the Stockholm Peace Appeal to outlaw nuclear war, a type of

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<sup>1</sup>Great Britain, Keesing's Contemporary Archives, 1950-1952. Vol. VIII, (London: Keesing's Publications Ltd., July 22-29, 1950), p. 10864.

<sup>2</sup>New Life (Kanggye POW Camp, North Korea), January 22, 1951.

war which the Chinese Communists sought diligently to avoid in Korea.<sup>1</sup>

The Chinese demanded that the committee produce a suitable peace appeal indicating that the prisoners had been duped into joining the war in Korea, and that they were being used as cannon-fodder to keep hostilities going so as to swell the coffers of the Wall Street financiers and warmongers. The actual wording was left to the committee. Staff Sergeant Harrison was chosen to draft the document, which he did with the greatest of care. Every effort was made to produce a text that would satisfy the Communists yet at the same time would not provide them with a propaganda victory. In all, five drafts were prepared, but none suited the Chinese. Finally the chief interpreter, Lieutenant Pan, wrote a petition. The committee refused to sign the Chinese version and ordered the other prisoners to follow their lead. When the Chinese threatened and intimidated the committee, the small group agreed to sign if the rest of the prisoners were exempted. The Chinese agreed, and the committee members affixed their signatures, though some members scrawled illegible signatures and others misspelled their own names. Signing of the petition was the last act of the Kanggye peace committee.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Allen S. Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1960), pp. 142 and fn 57, p. 98.

<sup>2</sup>British POW Report, p. 11.

Communist efforts to convert the Marines and other prisoners to their own beliefs can be read in their directive prohibiting the use of the term "POW". Instead they used the term "newly liberated friends", and they insisted that the prisoners refer to each other in the same vein. The Chinese stressed the virtues of Communism at every opportunity, in lectures, in discussions, and in casual and informal conversations. They continually exhorted their charges to progress more rapidly in their studies, and the promise of release for the more progressive of the newly liberated friends served as the inducement.

As the indoctrination program continued, many progressive POW's were used to give lectures on the same subjects the Chinese had covered. Group discussion was encouraged, and with the help of progressive POW's the Chinese exerted influence on the "unprogressive" prisoners to quiet their opposition and bring them into line. There were progressives and reactionaries to be found in each major group of POW's - among Marines, commandos, and soldiers.

Throughout the entire indoctrination program the Communists denounced religion as a superstition and a device for controlling people's minds. The Chinese attempted to teach Darwin's theory of evolution, but when they encountered strong resistance to that proposal they dropped the idea. Curiously the POW's were permitted to retain whatever religious articles they had on their person at the time of capture. As a result several bibles, testaments, rosaries and other religious articles were

available in camp, and the prisoners were able to hold informal religious discussions and readings by squad groups. The Chinese knew of this practice, but they did not interfere, and at times some of them seemed to indicate respect for the beliefs of the Christians.<sup>1</sup>

Interrogations continued apace with indoctrination. Tactical information had been sought early in the game. The Communists now turned their attention to detailed military questions. In addition to order of battle information, the interrogators queried the Marines about close air support techniques, naval gunfire methods, and amphibious vehicles and craft. They spent even more time delving into the life histories of their prisoners. They sought biographical data, with no detail too small for their purposes. Prisoners were also made to fill out economic questionnaires.<sup>2</sup>

From the very start it became apparent that Chinese interrogation techniques were an integral part of their

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<sup>1</sup>J. Angus MacDonald, "Religion in POW Camps" (unpublished MS filed with G-3, Historical Branch, HQMC, pp. 6-7).

<sup>2</sup>The technique of requiring POW's to write extensive biographies was employed by the Soviets with captured German prisoners during World War II. Writing biographies helped condition prisoners of war for further cooperation with their captives and at the same time provided considerable information for greater exploitation. The use of biographies by the Soviets was described in a study prepared for the U. S. Army by a German Major General: Alfred Toppe, The Russian Program of Propagandizing Prisoners of War. MS No. P-018c of Historical Division, European Command PW Project No. 14. Koenigstein: September 1949. Translated by M. Franke, edited by Dr. Frederiksen, p. 12.

indoctrination program. Instead of soliciting truthful answers to their questions, the interrogators were satisfied only with answers that suited their purpose. POW's who were interrogated found themselves arguing with the Chinese over such matters as the amount of income or social status of their parents or families. As the prisoners revised their status and income statistics downward, the Communists seemed more pleased and less prone to argue.

The indoctrination period lasted for about eight weeks. On March 3, 1951, the inmates of Kanggye were assembled and marched from the camp into Kanggye proper. There they were embarked on a train and moved south to Somidong where they arrived on March 5th. Three days later, the 290 prisoners were divided into two groups, one of which included 60 prisoners of whom 24 were Marines. The second group of 230 prisoners included Major McLaughlin, Warrant Officer McCool, and Lieutenants Lloyd and Turner. Lieutenant Messman, the artillery officer who had joined the POW's en route to Kanggye, also accompanied the larger column. The officers were taken to Pyoktong, Korea, where they were confined in the officer's compound of Camp 5 on March 24th.<sup>1</sup> Some of the enlisted prisoners may have been confined elsewhere in Camp 5, but the majority of the enlisted continued the march to Chongsong and Camp 1.

At this time approximately 2,000 United Nations prisoners of war were interned in Camp 5. The camp con-

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<sup>1</sup>Thrash letter to CMC.

sisted of part of the civilian village which had existed there before the war. Built on a peninsula which jutted out into the Yalu Reservoir, Pyoktong offered little chance for escape. The camp was surrounded on three sides by fast moving water. Egress from the peninsula was under the careful scrutiny of watchful guards. Fences, barricades, barbed wire and searchlights were unnecessary. The prisoners were as effectively hemmed in as if all these deterrents were present.<sup>1</sup>

The Marine officers were placed with approximately 145 other officers. Conditions were extremely severe, and officers and men died in large numbers. A starvation diet and complete absence of anything even remotely resembling medical care contributed to the mounting death toll. The bodies were taken to a hillside graveyard and placed in shallow holes scraped in the frozen dirt. When possible, the men on the burial details whispered short prayers during the interment. Later, when the spring thaw came, hogs routed up the bodies and chewed the remains.<sup>2</sup>

Though he was junior to some Army and Air Force officers, Major McLaughlin was elected by his fellow officer-prisoners to represent them. His role covered all aspects of their camp life, but the Marine's principal job was obtaining food and supervising its preparation and distribution. The Chinese quickly recognized him as

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<sup>1</sup>Dennis Lankford, I Defy (London: Allen Wingate Publishers, Ltd., 1954), p. 32.

<sup>2</sup>Lloyd W. Pate, Reactionary (New York: Harper & Bros., 1955) p. 56.

the leader of the entire group of officers, and they concentrated their pressures on him. At first they attempted to subvert his moral and ethical standards by promising better treatment and food for all if he would co-operate in their propaganda ventures. The enemy was attempting to form progressive groups of officers to write propaganda leaflets, appeals for peace, articles condemning the United States and the war, and seditious letters and other literature. When he refused to co-operate, Major McLaughlin was subjected to intimidation, torture and threats of death.

No discussion of Camp 5 at Pyoktong can be complete without at least mentioning Captain Emil J. Kapaun, Chaplains Corps, U. S. Army.<sup>1</sup> The Catholic priest was one of the great heroes of the prison camps. Scarcely a returning prisoner who knew him failed to laud his heroic behavior and selfless interest in his fellow-men.<sup>2</sup> On November 2, 1950, Chaplain Kapaun had voluntarily remained with a group of wounded soldiers from his own unit, the 2d Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry (Infantry) Division. After capture he was taken to Pyoktong where he was active in holding secret religious services for all

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<sup>1</sup>The activities of Father Kapaun are the central theme for the following:

Ray M. Dowe Jr., The Ordeal of Father Kapaun (Notre Dame, Indiana: The Ave Maria Press, 1954); and

Father Arthur Tonne, The Story of Chaplain Kapaun (Emporia, Kansas: Didge Publishers, 1954).

<sup>2</sup>Father Patrick O'Connor, "Faith Behind Barbed Wire", Hawaii Catholic Herald, October 16, 1953.

his fellow-prisoners. He stole food and sneaked into the enlisted compounds to distribute it. Though his ministrations were available to all, Marine Warrant Officer Felix McCool was one of the last to receive the Sacrament of Penance from the priest before the latter died from the effects of malnutrition, gangrene, pneumonia and an embolism.<sup>1</sup>

During the time that most of Kanggye's inmates marched to Chongsong and Pyoktong, the smaller group of 60 undertook a march of an entirely different nature. They were led southward through the rugged mountains of north central Korea by way of Tokchon, Yangkok, and Majon-ni.

Two of the 24 Marines with the group became sick during the long march south. One of these, Private First Class Leon Roebuck, complained of stomach pains on March 10th. Two days later he died and was buried along the route of march.<sup>2</sup> In the second case Private First Class Hans W. Grahl had become ill and had been carried for several days by Corporal Aguirre. Grahl became too sick even to be carried and the Chinese finally left him behind, presumably with Koreans.<sup>3</sup> He was never seen again and is presumed to have died shortly after being left in the wake of the column.

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<sup>1</sup>Hawaii Catholic Herald, October 15, 1953.

<sup>2</sup>Letter from CG, 1st MarDiv to CMC, serial 23448 of May 31, 1951; enclosure 6, statement of Staff Sergeant Charles L. Harrison.

<sup>3</sup>Mathis letter.

On April 5th, after leaving Majon-ni, the prisoners were split into two groups with some Marines in each. It appeared to Staff Sergeant Charles L. Harrison that his group was brought south to a warmer area where they could more easily survive during the chilly spring, and where they could perform working details in rear of the front lines. Sergeant Harrison had considerable experience with Orientals. He had been captured by the Japanese at Wake Island on December 23, 1941, and held prisoner until his release on Hokkaido on September 7, 1945. His previous experience as a prisoner of war taught him how to survive as a POW. He was able to read and speak enough Japanese to gain information and to determine his general location from sign posts. He was helped in this regard by Corporal Saburo "Sam" Shimamura, a U. S. Army interpreter who had been attached to the 1st Marine Division, and by Marine Corporal Andrew Aguirre who learned to speak Mandarin Chinese during a tour of duty in North China after World War II. Between them, they were able to converse with natives and keep informed as to their location.

As a matter of interest, Sergeant Harrison compared the treatment by the Japanese and the Chinese. As he puts it, "The Japs hated our guts and were just plain mean. I admired them for this because they really believed in their cause and were loyal to it." On the other hand, he refers to the false friendship and deceit of his Chinese captors.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Harrison letter.

When the other officers, Army and Marine, were marched west to Pyoktong, Lieutenant Frank E. Cold was marched southward with the promise of eventual release. He had been told that his fellow officers were being taken north to a university for further training.<sup>1</sup> Master Sergeant Gust H. Dunis from the Military Police Company was the second ranking Marine in the column. The 56 year old Sergeant Dunis had barely survived the brutal march to Kanggye, and on at least one occasion during that march he sat down in the snow and dared the Chinese to shoot him. En route to the battle line in the spring of 1951 Gust Dunis amused himself and a few Korean natives by removing his false teeth, a feat which earned him the open-mouthed admiration of the natives and an occasional cigarette or piece of yud.<sup>2</sup>

Central direction fell to Staff Sergeant Charles L. Harrison who became the obvious leader and who guided his fellow-Marines on their way to eventual freedom. He was assisted by Corporal Saburo Shimamura and Staff Sergeant James Nash.

When the members of the group were interrogated by Lieutenant Colonel William A. Wood, Operational Intelligence Officer on the staff of Commander, Naval Forces, Far East, Colonel Wood concluded that Harrison had clearly been the

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<sup>1</sup>Letter from CG, 1st MarDiv to CMC, serial 23448 of May 31, 1951; enclosure 2, statement of First Lieutenant Frank E. Cold.

<sup>2</sup>Martin, p. 109.



NORTH KOREA

May 1951

K - Kanggye Camp

V - The Valley

5 - POW Camp by number

MAP - 7

most effective leader in the entire group.<sup>1</sup>

By April 13th, the prisoners had arrived in the Chorwon area. They were told they would be released at a safe place somewhere in the Chorwon-Kumhwa area. At that time the United Nations forces were advancing northward.

On April 22nd, the Chinese launched their spring counter-offensive. Four days later they brought some 300 newly captured prisoners into the Chorwon area. This number included four Turks, two British, one U. S. Navy pilot and one U. S. Marine pilot, Captain Paul L. Martelli. Captain Martelli, an F4U fighter pilot from VMF-323, was shot down on April 3, 1951, and during the two and a half years he spent as a prisoner he proved to be a staunch resister to Communist indoctrination and a thorn in the side of the Chinese.<sup>2</sup>

The bulk of the new prisoners were from the U. S. 24th and 25th Divisions. A temporary prisoner of war camp was set up and the newly captured prisoners were joined by the two small groups already in the area. The POW's who by then had five month's experience in CCF hands helped organize camp routine.

The Chinese informed the 58 POW's from Kanggye that half of them would be released and half would be used to help fight for peace within the POW camp, but they deliberately withheld the information as to which individuals

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<sup>1</sup>Wood interview.

<sup>2</sup>Fink, MS comment.

would be released. The POW's were taunted with vague promises of freedom and, in the words of one of the Chinese interpreters, would be left to "sweat it out." Finally on May 18th, 18 Marines from the original group and Shimamura, the nisei interpreter, were separated from the main group. The remaining 39 members of the original group were marched north again. This group included Technical Sergeants Mathis and Roberts, Corporal Aguirre and PFC Yesko.<sup>1</sup> Upon his release at the end of the war, one of the Army personnel who returned north with this group, Lieutenant George P. Shedd of the 3d Infantry Division, reported that the Chinese told him they were not released because of the tactical situation.<sup>2</sup> Shimamura and the 18 Marines were given safe conduct passes and told they would be taken to the area in which the 1st Marine Division was operating. There they were to be released. For once, they did not have to walk. The group of 19 was taken to Chunchon by truck. They were then taken under guard and marched around in the vicinity of the front lines. On May 24th, when they were fairly close to the battle area, an artillery bombardment registered nearby. The Communist guards fled in confusion seeking cover. Fortunately, they all fled in the same direction. The prisoners ran in the opposite direction and headed for high ground where they successfully eluded the guards. From their vantage point

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<sup>1</sup>Mathis letter.

<sup>2</sup>The Washington Post, August 27, 1953, p. 7.

the escapees watched Communist troops retreating past them during the balance of the day and that night. The next day, May 25th, the Marines fashioned makeshift air panels from wallpaper they stripped from a ruined Korean house. They spelled out "POWS - 19 RESCUE" and their signal attracted the attention of Captain Edward N. Anderson flying an Army observation plane.<sup>1</sup> The pilot radioed their position to an Army reconnaissance unit, and three Army tanks were sent forward to escort the escapees to final safety. They entered friendly lines in the vicinity of Chunchon, the first and only group of prisoners to experience Communist indoctrination and to reach freedom after a prolonged period of internment.

Roughly two months after their return, the 19 men were interviewed by Harold H. Martin, a staff writer for the Saturday Evening Post. In his article describing the experiences of the group, Mr. Martin made a point of the fact that none of the Americans had been converted to Communism but had merely played along with the Communists to gain their own release.<sup>2</sup> Their tactics succeeded.

The lenient policy at Kanggye had been reflected in intensive indoctrination for all and in surprisingly easy treatment for some. After leaving Kanggye, the Marines who the Chinese believed to be progressive were released; the remainder together with the commandos and soldiers from

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., May 26, 1951, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Martin, The Saturday Evening Post, August 25, 1951, p. 109

Kanggye undertook difficult marches to new camps where the lenient policy was considerably more harsh in its application. The prisoner of war compounds of Pyoktong and Chongsong also proved to be indoctrination centers. Still another camp played a part in the lives of a few of the Marines captured in 1950. The Valley near Kanggye had its own role quite apart from the other places at which Marines were held or processed.

Upon arrival at The Valley, Sergeant Griffith and the Dowling brothers were initially confined in a pig pen which they shared with several other POW's including two Marines, Corporal Robert Arias and PFC George V. Cowen. The latter two had been captured during the heavy fighting in the hills north of Yudam-ni on the 27th and 28th of November. Arias marched from Yudam-ni to The Valley in subzero weather in his stocking feet, a step made necessary when his captors appropriated his shoe laces for their own<sup>1</sup> use.

Arias and Cowen informed Sergeant Griffith that another Marine had been removed from the separation center and taken southward to make a surrender broadcast. Whether or not the broadcast was made is not known. Sergeant Griffith spoke to the individual only briefly and never saw him again after their brief encounter in The Valley even though later they were confined in the same camp for a short period.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Griffith letter.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

After a brief incarceration in the pig pen, the Dowling brothers, both still in reasonably good physical condition, were marched away to another camp. Griffith was assigned to a shack with other wounded prisoners. Marine Corporal Harry M. Bringes from 4/11 eventually joined him as an occupant of the shack, having been transferred to this "hospital" from Kanggye. The two Marines struck up a close acquaintance but Bringes refused to eat. Sergeant Griffith forced Bringes to eat, argued with him, babied him, and finally, after almost four months in The Valley, helped bury him in a mass grave. Bringes was one of the few Marines to die from "give-up-itis", the term applied to the apathy that struck countless POW's and claimed a heavy toll of lives.<sup>1</sup>

Whereas only 15 to 20 POW's died at Kanggye, the death rate in The Valley earned that collection center an ominous reputation, at least among its population. There was no organized indoctrination, however, and the POW's were generally left to themselves. Disturbed by the infestation of lice, the filth, the steady attrition among the sick and wounded prisoners, and half starved from an inadequate diet, Sergeant Griffith attempted to escape. He pretended to go to the latrine late one night, and, finding the guard asleep, he limped down the path leading out of the valley. He was undetected and continued walking until dawn when he located a shed next to a Korean hut.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

Inside the shed he found a complete set of clothing, so he exchanged his threadbare dungarees for the baggy Korean clothes and then hid in a pile of rice bags to rest.<sup>1</sup>

After about four hours sleep, the best he had had in months, Sergeant Griffith arose and walked directly up to the hut where he knocked at the door. Through sign language he made his hunger known and was given a large and most satisfying meal. While he was eating, his host's son was out contacting a military patrol which even then was on Griffith's trail. He had barely finished his meal and a hand-rolled cigarette when a group of Communist soldiers closed in and recaptured him. His shoe pacs were taken from him, and he was made to walk back to The Valley in his threadbare ski socks. The patrol took Griffith to an officer, probably their company commander, who promptly beat the Marine across the face with a stick. Griffith was then made to walk up a nearby hill, and, as he did so, the Chinese officer fired a rifle in his general direction. Griffith was called back by the officer, and then directed to walk up the hill a second time. This time a shot was fired so close to his head the sergeant heard the sharp snap as the bullet narrowly missed him. He was called back a second time and again beaten about the face until his old wounds bled.

Sergeant Griffith was put back into the pig pen which he shared with a soldier who had been caught steal-

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

ing potatoes. Within about a week and a half the soldier became demented and soon died. Griffith endured the pig pen for a month before he was returned to a regular hut. It was there he learned that an Army lieutenant had informed the Chinese of his escape, thus triggering an early search. As for the informer, Sergeant Griffith had this to say:

I know the Army Lts name and so does a lot of other POWs. However, he died, so there is no need to hurt those he left behind. The story of my escape had been told to some Marine officers who were POWs. They asked me about the Army Lt., at that time he was housed with the Marine officers. They had all the details and had the Lt. reached freedom I am quite sure charges would have been brought against him. The Marine officers always did what they could for us, and to me, whenever I had an opportunity to talk to one of the officers it seemed to give me a big lift. That certain "something" that seems to weld men together prevailed more among the Marine POWs than it did with the other captured UN Troops.<sup>1</sup>

The officer who had informed on Sergeant Griffith was sent to Camp 3 briefly and thence on to the "Bean Camp" located at Suan, about 45 miles south east of Pyongyang. He died while at that camp.<sup>2</sup>

The lenient policy was a mania with the Chinese. It is quite possible that they really believed they were being humane and lenient with the prisoners of war. Anyone who has spent any time in the Orient has undoubtedly seen examples of the callous treatment meted out by many officials to underlings, offenders, criminals or political

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Perry interview, November 14, 1960. 1stLt Felix Ferranto was one of the officers to whom Griffith related the incident.

prisoners. It would seem that by comparison many of the POW's received less vicious treatment than did some of the local civilian prisoners. But if this is true to any degree, it would also seem that the lenient policy did not filter down to the North Korean military or paramilitary forces. They were brutal and barbaric to a degree difficult to imagine. Although Marines did not often have contact with North Korean forces after October, 1950, one of the encounters serves to illustrate the murderous nature of the enemy.

Having withdrawn from Hungnam in December, 1950, the 1st Marine Division rested and refitted at Masan in South Korea. During the first three months of 1951 the Marines conducted antiguerrilla operations in the mountainous areas surrounding the port city of Pohang-dong.<sup>1</sup> According to official statistics no Marines were captured by the enemy during this period.<sup>2</sup> The vagaries of statistics have obscured the fate of a small group of Marines which did fall into enemy hands.<sup>3</sup>

When hunting guerrillas, units of the 1st Marine

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<sup>1</sup> 1st MarDiv HistD, January, 1951.

<sup>2</sup> USMC Casualties.

<sup>3</sup> Except as otherwise noted, details of Patrol No. 8 were derived from the following sources:  
1st MarDiv HistD, January, 1951, p. 14; and  
5th Marines, Unit Report, February 1951, Annex B to 1st MarDiv HistD, February, 1951, p. 20; and  
Korean Communications Zone, War Crimes Division, Interim Historical Report, KWC No. 185, pp. 20, 24, 34. Cited hereafter as KComZ War Crimes Report.

Division sent out numerous squad patrols, each generally accompanied by one or more South Korean policemen. The police served as guides and interpreters without whose assistance the Marines would have been unable to differentiate between friendly South Koreans and enemy guerrillas. On January 28, 1951, eleven patrols were sent out by the 5th Marine Regiment. One of these, patrol number eight, was due to be picked up by motor patrol three days later. Patrol eight failed to make the rendezvous.

The men of Company B, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines were particularly surprised when that patrol failed to return. The squad had worked together for some time and at least two of their number, the squad leader and the senior fire team leader, had been in Korea since landing with the 1st Marine Brigade in August the previous year. According to the company commander, these two noncommissioned officers had considerable experience in patrolling, and the squad leader had the reputation of being able to smell the enemy, an appellation reserved for competent and combat-tested Marines.<sup>1</sup> The Company B Marines were generally of the opinion that the squad had either been betrayed by their Korean guide or had been surprised by the enemy dressed in civilian clothing.

The patrol continued on its mission for three days when a Korean woman witnessed its surrender to North Korean

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<sup>1</sup> Personal interview with LtCol James T. Cronin, USMC, August 30 and September 4, 1960.

guerrillas who had set up an ambush along a trail near her village. Later the woman related the incident to U. S. Army military policemen who were investigating the case.<sup>1</sup>

The Marines were taken to a house in the general vicinity and were kept there as prisoners for a week. The guerrilla commander then directed his lieutenants to prepare to execute the prisoners secretly. Shallow graves were dug in the frozen earth, ready to receive the victims. On February 5, 1951, the day appointed for the executions, the Koreans led the first prisoner forth alone. He was made to strip naked in the chill February winds. Once stripped, his hands were bound behind his back with wire and he was forced to sit down. Completely helpless now, the unfortunate prisoner suddenly found himself serving as a practice dummy for the cruel bayonets of a sadistic enemy. And one by one, the ten Marines died solitary deaths from multiple bayonet slashes in chest and back. Some who resisted or who died too slowly to suit their captors, were slaughtered by crushing butt strokes from the heel or toe of the rifle stock. One of the Marines was interred in a standing position, buried up to his eyebrows. Another had a large rock resting on his chest. The remainder were dropped into shallow graves and hastily covered over. In addition to the ten Marines, ten Republic of Korea soldiers, four National policemen,

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<sup>1</sup>5th Marine HistD, March, 1951, p. 25.

and one civilian died in a similar manner. The only difference in treatment meted out by the guerrillas seems to have been more detailed mutilation of the corpses of their Korean victims. Many of the latter had ears and noses cut off and eyes stabbed out.

A patrol from the 2d ROK Division found the bodies on March 7, 1951, while investigating a National Police report. The corpses gave mute testimony of the details of the atrocity. Later, as circumstances would have it, two captured North Korean lieutenants confessed to their participation in the crime. Their confessions were obtained at different times and places, but the factual data was the same. With both the victims and the perpetrators in United Nations custody, the case of the Marine patrol numbers one of the 34 Korean war crime cases referable to higher headquarters for action as a bona fide war crime. And here again, the statisticians came into play. Patrol number eight graced the missing in action lists from February 11th until March 21st, when the names were transferred to the killed in action list.<sup>1</sup> As a consequence, their names are neither listed on the final statistical compilation of Marines who were captured by the enemy and who died in their hands nor are they among the 391 Marines missing and presumed dead. They represent ten of the 3169 ground Marines listed as killed in action.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>1st MarDiv, Personnel Daily Summary 82, March 21, 1951; and  
1st MarDiv, Casualty Bulletin 45-51, February 11, 1951.

<sup>2</sup>USMC Casualties.