

A black and white historical photograph showing three U.S. Marines in full combat gear running through a city street. They are wearing helmets and carrying rifles. The street is littered with debris, and there are buildings and utility poles in the background. A vertical sign with Japanese characters is visible on the left building.

BATTLE OF THE BARRICADES

U.S. Marines in the
Recapture of Seoul

*by Colonel Joseph H. Alexander,
U.S. Marine Corps, Retired*

Marines in the Korean War Commemorative Series



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U.S. Marines in the Recapture of Seoul

by Colonel Joseph H. Alexander, USMC (Ret)

Late on the afternoon of 24 September 1950, Captain Robert H. Barrow's Company A, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, secured the military crest of Hill 79 in the southwest corner of Seoul, the enemy-occupied capital of the Republic of South Korea.

This momentous day for Barrow and his men began with a nerve-racking crossing of the Han River in open-hatched DUKWs, the ubiquitous amphibious trucks of World War II. Debarkation on the north shore had been followed by an unorthodox passage of lines "on the fly" of the regiment's lead battalion and the subsequent high-tempo attack on Hill 79. Now the rifle company assumed defensive positions on the objective, the men gazing in awe at the capital city arrayed to their north and east, sprawling virtually to the horizon. Thousands of North Korean Peoples' Army (NKPA) troops lay waiting for them behind barricades or among countless courtyards and rooftops. Tens of thousands of civilians still clung to life in the battered city. The Marines were a very long way from the barren

beaches of Tarawa or Peleliu. Even smoking Inchon, their amphibious objective 10 days earlier seemed far distant. Seoul would represent the largest objective the Marines ever assailed.

Earlier that day Colonel Lewis B. "Chesty" Puller, commanding the 1st Marines, issued a folded American flag to be raised on the regiment's first objective within the city limits. Barrow's battalion commander gave him the honor as the point company in the assault. The time was right. Barrow's men attached the national colors to a pole and raised them proudly on a rooftop on Hill 79. *Life* magazine photographer David Douglas Duncan, himself a Marine combat veteran, captured the moment on film. The photograph proved unremarkable—Hill 79 was no Mount Suribachi—but it reflected an indelible moment in Marine Corps history. Seven weeks earlier the 1st Marine Division was a division in name only. This afternoon a rifle company from that hastily reconstituted division had seized the first hill within occupied Seoul while all three regiments converged inexorably on the capital's rambling perimeter.

Barrow's flag-raising initiative enraged the neighboring 5th Marines, still slugging its way through the last of the bitterly defended ridges protecting the city's northwest approaches. Chang Dok Palace, the Republic of Korea's government center, lay within the 5th Marines' assigned zone. There, the 5th Marines

insisted, should be the rightful place for the triumphant flag-raising. Barrow brushed aside the complaints. "Putting the flag on a bamboo pole over a peasant's house on the edge of Seoul does not constitute retaking the city," he said. Whether premature or appropriate, the flag raising on Hill 79 was an exuberant boost to morale at a good time. Chang Dok Palace lay just two miles north of Barrow's current position, but getting there in force would take the Marines three more days of extremely hard fighting.

By the night of 19 September Major General Oliver P. Smith, commanding the 1st Marine Division, had grounds for caution.

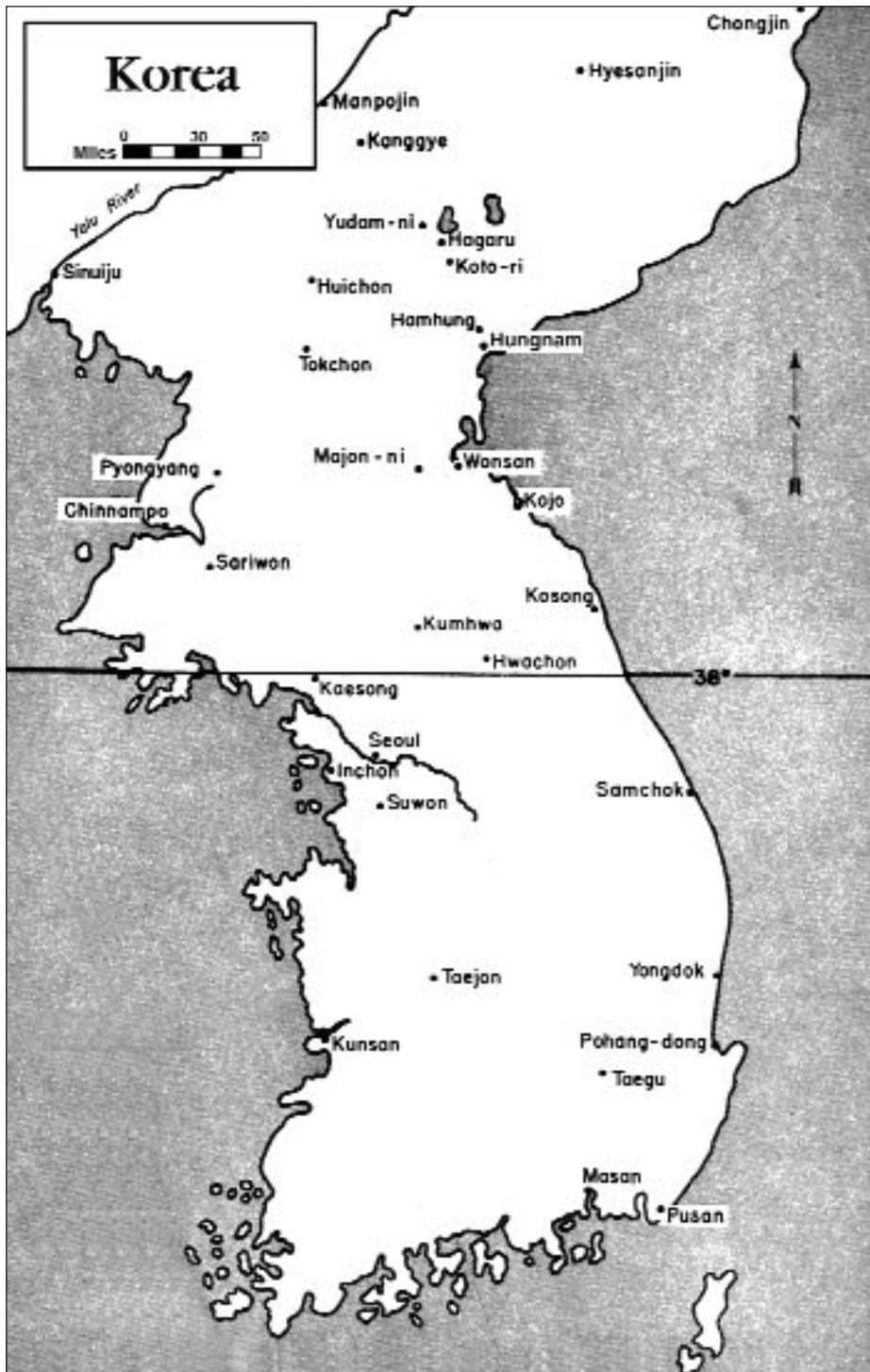
Capt Robert H. Barrow, commanding Company A, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, pauses to raise the first American flag within the city limits of Seoul on Hill 79.

Photo by David Douglas Duncan



On the Cover: *Bitter fighting, house-to-house, with every alleyway, every storefront window being a deadly hazard to the Marines recapturing Seoul.* Photo by David Douglas Duncan

At left: *Lead elements of a Marine rifle squad pause by a captured North Korean barricade in Seoul to assign the next objective.* Photo by David Douglas Duncan



National Archives Photo (USA) 111-SC348519
MajGen Oliver P. Smith, a veteran of the Cape Gloucester, Peleliu, and Okinawa campaigns in the Pacific during World War II, commanded the 1st Marine Division throughout the Inchon-Seoul-Chosin campaigns.

landed at Inchon and moved rapidly to cover the exposed right flank of Smith's approach to Seoul, south of Chesty Puller's 1st Marines. The 7th Marines' long, global journey to Inchon was about to end. Meanwhile, General Almond had strengthened Smith's light division by attaching two battalions of the 1st Republic of Korea (ROK) Marine Regiment, green but spirited sea soldiers.

Against these positive developments, O. P. Smith worried about his lack of a significant reserve, the absence of bridging material throughout X Corps, the morning's requirement to split his division on both sides of a tidal river, and the realization that the landing force would henceforth pass beyond the effective range of the guns of the fleet. He could also sense that North Korean resistance was stiffening and the quality of the opposition was improving. All signs pointed to a major clash in the week ahead.

Intelligence analysts on both division and corps staffs had diffi-

Despite the impatient insistence on speed of advance by the X Corps commander, Major General Edward S. "Ned" Almond, USA, Smith knew he led a two-regiment division against an unknown enemy defending an enormous urban center.

On one hand, the pace of the allied build-up encouraged Smith.

Two new Marine fighter squadrons had commenced flying into Kimpo Airfield since the 5th Marines captured it intact on the 18th, and they would launch their first Vought F4U Corsair strikes in support of the X Corps advance the morning of the 20th. The 32d Infantry Regiment of Major General David G. Barr's 7th Infantry Division had

Principal Commanders, 1st Marine Division, Seoul

1st Marine Division

Commanding General: Major General Oliver P. Smith
Assistant Division Commander: Brigadier General Edward A. Craig
G-3: Colonel Alpha L. Bowser, Jr.

1st Marines

Commanding Officer: Colonel Lewis B. Puller
1st Battalion: Lieutenant Colonel Jack Hawkins
2d Battalion: Lieutenant Colonel Alan Sutter
3d Battalion: Lieutenant Colonel Thomas L. Ridge

5th Marines

Commanding Officer: Lieutenant Colonel Raymond L. Murray
1st Battalion: Lieutenant Colonel George R. Newton
2d Battalion: Lieutenant Colonel Harold S. Roise
3d Battalion: Lieutenant Colonel Robert D. Taplett

7th Marines

Commanding Officer: Colonel Homer L. Litzenberg, Jr.
1st Battalion: Lieutenant Colonel Raymond G. Davis
2d Battalion: Lieutenant Colonel Thornton M. Hinkle (Wounded in Action-
Evacuated, September 28)
Major Webb D. Sawyer (from September 28)
3d Battalion: Major Maurice E. Roach

11th Marines

Commanding Officer: Colonel James H. Brower
1st Battalion: Lieutenant Colonel Ransom M. Wood
2d Battalion: Lieutenant Colonel Merritt Adelman
3d Battalion: Major Francis F. Parry
4th Battalion: Major William McReynolds

Other Division Units

Commanding Officer, 1st Shore Party Battalion: Lieutenant Colonel Henry P. Crowe
Commanding Officer, 1st Engineer Battalion: Lieutenant Colonel John H. Partridge
Commanding Officer, 1st Tank Battalion: Lieutenant Colonel Harry T. Milne
Commanding Officer, 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion: Lieutenant Colonel Erwin F. Wann, Jr.
Commanding Officer, VMO-6: Major Vincent J. Gottschalk
Commanding Officer, 1st Service Battalion: Lieutenant Colonel Charles L. Banks
Commanding Officer, 1st Ordnance Battalion: Major Lloyd O. Williams
Commanding Officer, 1st Motor Transport Battalion: Lieutenant Colonel Olin L. Beall
Commanding Officer, 1st Medical Battalion: Commander H. B. Johnson, Jr., USN
Commanding Officer, 1st Signal Battalion: Major Robert L. Schreier
Commanding Officer, Reconnaissance Company: Captain Kenneth J. Houghton

culty defining an enemy order of battle after the Inchon landing because of the chaos the landing created in the headquarters of the NKPA in Pyongyang, the North Korean capital. Ignoring dozens of telltale indicators, the NKPA seemed astonished that the Commander in Chief, Far East, General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, could have landed such a large force amid Inchon's narrow channels and formidable mudflats. The Marines' quick seizure of the port, Ascom City, and Kimpo Airfield further disoriented the North Koreans.

By the night of the 19th-20th, however, the North Korean high command finally had major troop units on the move to defend the South Korean capital. They turned around the untested *18th NKPA Division*, bound from Seoul to the Pusan Perimeter, and recalled a veteran regiment of the *9th NKPA Division* from the southwest corner of the Naktong River. Most of these troops would defend the industrial suburb of Yongdungpo, directly south of the Han from central Seoul, against the 1st Marines.

On 20 September, while Lieutenant Colonel Raymond L. Murray led his 5th Marines across the Han River, two significant enemy units reached Seoul from assembly areas in North Korea to man the northwest defenses against this new American threat above the Han. From Sariwon came Colonel Pak Han Lin at the head of his *78th Independent Infantry Regiment*, some 1,500-2,000 untested troops in three infantry battalions. From nearby Chorwon came Colonel Wol Ki Chan's *25th NKPA Brigade*, more than 4,000 strong. Colonel Wol had received "postgraduate" tactical training in the Soviet Union and had trained his green troops well. His newly formed brigade con-

tained an unusual concentration of crew-served weapons, including four heavy weapons battalions providing a proliferation of anti-tank and anti-aircraft guns, plus heavy machine guns. Wol led the two units west of town to prepare last-ditch defenses along the same jumbled ridges where the Japanese had formerly conducted infantry-training exercises. General Smith's intuition had been correct. His North Korean enemy would shortly change from delaying tactics to hard-nosed, stand-and-deliver defense to the death.

Two Rough Roads To Seoul

Few things could faze Lieutenant Colonel Murray, the 5th Marines' commander, after his month-long experience as the Eighth Army's "Fire Brigade" in the Pusan Perimeter, but preparing his veteran regiment for an opposed crossing of the Han River on 20 September proved a daunting task. To begin with, Murray found his

LtCol Raymond L. Murray, a tall Texan who had earned a Silver Star on Guadalcanal, a second Silver Star on Tawara, and a Navy Cross on Saipan, commanded the 5th Marines.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A5850



North Korean Order Of Battle: Seoul/Wonsan Campaign

Defending the Northwest Approaches (Hill 296 Complex and beyond):

25th Brigade: Colonel Wol Ki Chan

78th Independent Infantry Regiment: Colonel Pak Han Lin

Seoul City Regiment

Defending Yongdungpo:

Elements of 3d Regiment, 9th Division

Elements of 18th and 87th Divisions

Defending Seoul:

Surviving components of the above forces

17th Rifle Division

43d Tank Regiment

19th Antiaircraft Regiment

513th Artillery Regiment

10th Railroad Regiment

Defending Uijongbu:

31st Regiment, 31st Division

75th Independent Regiment

Opposing 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, at Kojo:

10th Regiment, 5th Division: Colonel Cho Il Kwon

Opposing 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, at Majon-ni:

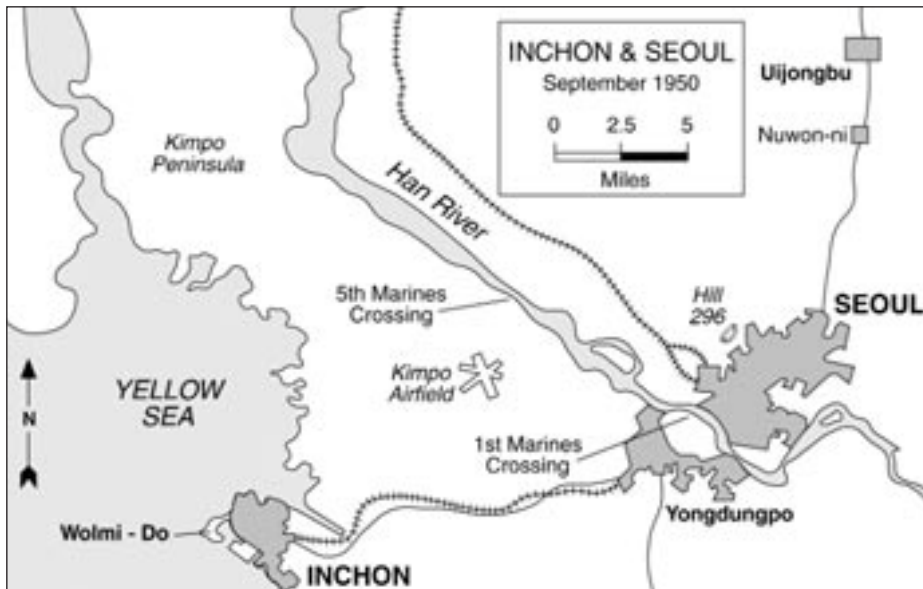
Elements of 15th Division: Major General Pak Sun Chol

command post crowded with high-ranking observers and correspondents. Each wondered how Murray would execute a crossing of such a broad river without heavy bridging material; all offered free advice. Murray abided these kibitzers for awhile, then cast them out.

A second situation proved more troublesome. While Murray felt confident the 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion could shuttle his riflemen across in their tracked landing vehicles (LVTs then, AAVs now), and while he was reasonably sure Lieutenant Colonel John H. Partridge, the division engineer, could ferry his attached tanks across by using 50-foot pontoon

sections, he still knew nothing of the river—its current, shoreline gradients, exit points. Nor did Murray know anything of the enemy's strength and capabilities in the vicinity of the abandoned ferry site at Haengju. Mile-long Hill 125 on the north bank dominated the crossing. Six years earlier Murray had led his 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, ashore at Saipan under direct fire from Japanese guns occupying the coastal hills, and he had no intention of repeating that experience here.

Murray asked General Smith to assign Captain Kenneth R. Houghton's division Reconnaissance Company to the crossing operation. Murray wanted an



Mary Craddock Hoffman

advance party of reconnaissance Marines to swim the Han after dark on 19 September, stealthily determine any enemy presence, and then signal the remainder of the company to cross in LVTs. Murray then expected the company to

man a defensive perimeter to cover the predawn crossing of Lieutenant Colonel Robert D. Taplett's 3d Battalion, 5th Marines.

Taplett considered the plan too ambitious. The Reconnaissance Company had the heart, he

believed, but not the numbers (127 strong) to cover the sprawling high ground along the river. No one knew anything in advance about the possibility of enemy presence in strength along the far bank. Taplett quietly ordered his staff to draw up contingency plans for the crossing.

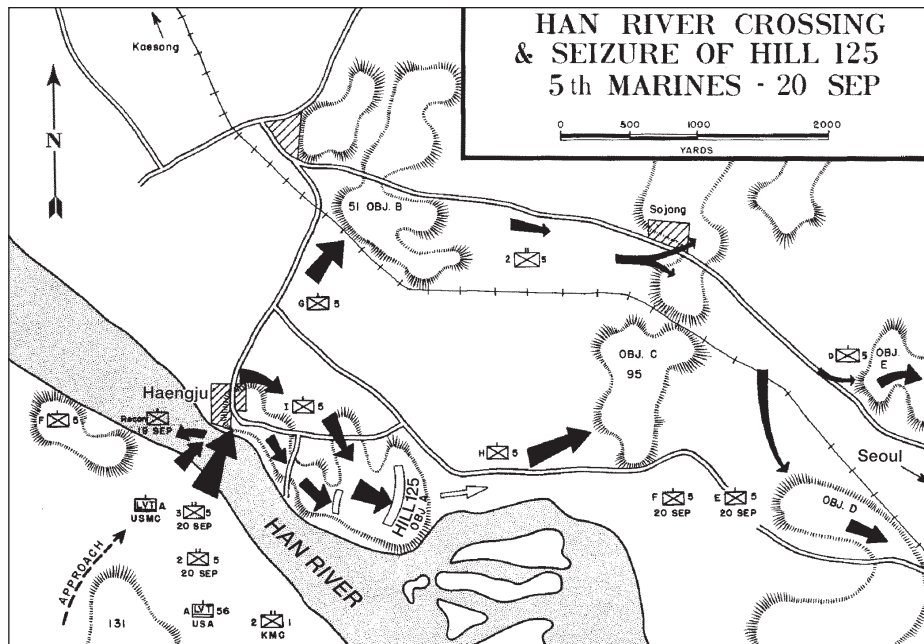
The North Koreans had not ignored the former ferry site. Aware that the Marines would likely cross the Han soon, the NKPA deployed an infantry battalion in the underbrush along Hill 125. Their camouflage discipline proved excellent. The Marines did not detect their presence throughout the afternoon and evening of the 19th.

After dark, Captain Houghton led 14 swimmers across the 400-yard-wide river. An ill-timed artillery mission set fire to a house in Haengju village, exposing the

Marine Corps amphibian tractors and DUKWs ferry troops across the Han River after the assault waves.

Photo by Frank Noel, Associated Press





men in their final approach to the north bank. Technical Sergeant Ernest L. Defazio complained the blaze “lit up the place like a Christmas tree,” but nothing stirred. Houghton dispatched four men to check for signs of the enemy on Hill 125, then sent an exultant but premature message to Murray: “The Marines have landed and the situation is well in hand.” Houghton also radioed his executive officer to launch the balance of the company in its nine LVTs.

So far, so good. But few sounds attract more attention on a quiet night than the sudden revving up of nine pairs of Cadillac V-8 Amtrac engines. The noise seemed enough to wake the dead, and abruptly the NKPA battalion on Hill 125 opened a vicious fire against the approaching LVTs and Houghton’s small group, now dangerously backlit by the burning building.

Second Lieutenant Philip D. Shutler commanded the second platoon of the Reconnaissance Company, his men divided between two LVTs that nosed into the river in column. Young as he was, Shutler had already been in

tight spots. He had spent the month of August making night raids from USS *Horace A. Bass* (APD 124) in the Sea of Japan against the North Korean coastline, his Marines teamed with Underwater Demolition Team 1. Crossing the Han was a dissimilar

experience, he later recounted. “Amphibian tractors were hardly stealthy vehicles,” Shutler recalled. “We received enemy fire as soon as the vehicles entered the water. You could hear machine gun rounds plinking against the armored cab. Mortar rounds, possibly from our own ‘four-deuce’ tubes, were exploding in the river.”

In the chaos some LVTs became stuck in the mud near the far shore, others veered away. Captain Houghton sprang into the river to rally the vehicles toward the landing site. Mortar rounds landed in the water near him; the concussion from one near miss knocked him out.

Lieutenant Shutler could see none of this from the crowded troop compartment of his lurching LVT. He scrambled topside, discovered to his horror that the vehicle had turned upstream, broadside to the NKPA gunners on Hill 125. He whacked the driver,

An LVT-3C of the 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion takes off from the south bank of the Han with a load of American and Korean Marines, while Marine engineers prepare a pontoon bridge to carry equipment.

Photo by Frank Noel, Associated Press



jumped into the waist-deep water, and attempted to guide the vehicle directly ashore. He saw no sign of the advance swimmers.

At this point someone passed the word to abort the mission and return to the south bank. Five LVTs returned, leaving four stuck in the mud along the far shore. One of these contained Captain Houghton's unconscious body. Other Marines were missing. Shutler found one of his troops had died of wounds in the confused melee. The crossing had failed.

When Technical Sergeant Ernie DeFazio discovered his captain missing he promptly led a swimmer team back across the river. They rescued Houghton and his radio operator, retrieved two of the stuck vehicles and restored more than a bit of the company's honor.

But the night was nearly spent, the enemy occupied the crossing site in considerable strength, and every VIP in the theater—including General Douglas MacArthur—had announced their intentions of observing the morning crossing. As assistant division commander, Brigadier General Edward A. Craig frankly observed: "The eyes of the world were upon us. It would have looked bad for the Marines, of all people, to reach a river and not be able to cross."

The 5th Marines calmly decided to approach the crossing as an amphibious assault mission—tightly coordinated preliminary fires on the objective, an intermediate and final objective assigned, and troops organized into boat teams configured to each LVT. Taplett's 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, would lead the landing in assault waves, followed by Lieutenant Colonel Harold S. Roise's 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, to expand the beachhead; the entire regiment with its attached tank company to cross

before dark. Marine Corsairs would arrive soon after sunrise to pound Hill 125 and scorch the Seoul-Kaesong highway to discourage any NKPA reinforcements.

Only a veteran force like the 5th Marines could have made such last-minute adaptations and passed the word to all hands in the remaining minutes before dawn. Taplett's original skepticism about the Reconnaissance Company's ability to hold an opposed bridgehead had served 3d Battalion, 5th Marines well; the battalion had already prepared worst-case alternative plans. By the time General Almond, Vice Admiral Arthur D. Struble, USN (Commander, Seventh Fleet), and Lieutenant General Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr., USMC (Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific) arrived they found Lieutenant Colonel Murray as unflappable as ever and the crossing well underway. Lieutenant Colonel Ransom M. Wood's 1st Battalion, 11th Marines, pounded the far bank with 105mm howitzers; Murray's own 81mm and 4.2-inch mortars joined the chorus. Taplett's first wave of six LVTs chugged resolutely on line towards the far bank.

At this point the NKPA battalion on Hill 125 opened a disciplined fire on the LVTs, scoring more than 200 hits on the vehicles as they trundled ashore. Fortunately their one antitank gun proved less accurate than their small arms fire. Taplett pressed on. His LVTs discharged Captain Robert A. McMullen's Company I, then pulled away for the return transit. McMullen quickly deployed his platoons up the open slopes of Hill 125 in a double envelopment. The fighting became point-blank and deadly.

With most NKPA gunners now taking aim at McMullen's Marines, the remaining companies of 3d

Battalion, 5th Marines, crossed the river with relative ease. Corporal Larry V. Brom, a Company H squad leader, worried more about the claustrophobia his men experienced in their LVT's cramped troop compartment than "the occasional splat of bullets against the armor plate." Company H's LVTs lurched out of the river and continued rolling north, crossing the railroad and highway to secure distant Hill 51. Corporal Brom led his men in a mad dash up the rise as soon as the rear ramp dropped, vastly relieved to discover the crest undefended.

By contrast, Company I had its hands full taking Hill 125. The lower approaches contained scant cover. Well-sited NKPA gunners scythed down Captain McMullen's exposed 60mm mortar section and two sections of light machine guns.

The situation improved dramatically with the appearance overhead of four Corsairs from Lieutenant Colonel Walter E. Lischeid's Marine Fighter Squadron 214 (VMF-214). The Black Sheep pilots launched at 0551 from the escort carrier USS *Sicily* (CVE 118) in the Yellow Sea, southwest of Inchon, arriving over the river just in time to even the odds against Company I's arduous assault with a series of ear-splitting rocket and napalm attacks against the North Koreans defending the high ground. McMullen spurred his men forward, upward amid the bedlam. Their difficult double envelopment converged on the crest, culminating in a vicious flurry of hand-to-hand combat. An abrupt silence followed, broken only by the Marines gasping for breath.

Taking Hill 125 cost Company I 43 casualties; it inflicted at least 200 upon the enemy. It had been a beautifully executed tactical assault, highlighted by the high-



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A409336

Advancing Marines examine the smoking ruin of a North Korean T-34 tank recently destroyed in an ambush.

speed, low-level strikes of the Corsairs. General Almond, observing this conflict from barely 500 yards away, admitted it was “one of the finest small-unit actions I’ve ever witnessed.”

The forcible taking of Hill 125 meant the remainder of the 5th Marines could cross the river unimpeded. By the time General MacArthur arrived the crossing seemed routine. “You’ve done a perfect job,” he told Lieutenant Colonel Murray, unaware of the all-night flail that preceded the perfection. Murray by then had his eye on the main objective, and he pointed upstream to the convoluted ridges that protected the approaches to Seoul from the northwest, the regimental route of advance. “They’ll all evaporate very shortly,” MacArthur assured Murray.

At a glance from long distance it seemed that the Supreme Allied Commander might have been right. Only eight miles separated Hill 125 at the Haengju crossing site from downtown Seoul. Murray’s advance elements covered half that distance on the afternoon of the 20th, raising false

hopes. Then NKPA resistance stiffened abruptly. It would take the 5th Marines a full week of desperate fighting to advance the final four miles into Seoul.

The 20th of September also began very early for Chesty Puller’s 1st Marines on their final approach to Yongdungpo. The *87th NKPA Regiment* launched two predawn spoiling attacks against both flanks. The southern attack, led by five T-34 tanks, posed the greatest threat. The veteran NKPA troops endeavored to repeat their high-speed, straight-down-the-highway armored tactics that had proven wildly successful in the initial invasion, but their tanks had now lost their invulnerability. The armored column barreled blindly into a lethal L-shaped ambush set by Lieutenant Colonel Alan Sutter’s 2d Battalion, 1st Marines. Short-range fire from Marine 3.5-inch bazookas knocked out the first two enemy tanks; a storm of direct and indirect fire cut down the supporting infantry, killing 300 men. The surviving North Koreans withdrew to their prepared defenses within Yongdungpo.

Puller pressed the advance, his

2d Battalion still astride the Inchon-Seoul highway, the 1st Battalion attacking through the hilly countryside below the Han. Sutter’s lop-sided success in thwarting the NKPA tank attack pleased Puller, but the initial view of sprawling Yongdungpo from his observation post brought forth Puller’s trademark scowl. The prospect of forcing a crossing of the high-banked Kalchon Canal, then fighting door-to-door through this large industrial suburb did not appeal to the veteran jungle fighter. When General Almond appeared from observing Murray’s river crossing, Puller asked him for authorization to employ unrestricted firepower in taking the city. The corps commander agreed. Puller unleashed two battalions of supporting artillery (Lieutenant Colonel Merritt Adelman’s 2d Battalion, 11th Marines, in direct support, and Major William McReynolds’ 4th Battalion, 11th Marines, in general support) plus air strikes by Marine Corsairs. The *Sicily*-based Black Sheep followed their early-morning assistance to the 5th Marines with two dozen sorties against Yongdungpo, dropping 500-pound bombs and strafing with 20mm cannon and rockets. The city began to burn.

The 1st Marines commenced its main assault on Yongdungpo at 0630 the next morning. Neither Sutter’s 2d Battalion or Lieutenant Colonel Jack Hawkins’ 1st Battalion could sustain much headway. Crossing the Kalchon was like crossing a medieval castle moat; clambering over the dikes was akin to “going over the top” in the trenches of World War I. Sutter’s outfit in particular took heavy casualties. The division’s Special Action Report recorded the loss of 17 officers and 200 men by the 2d Battalion along the canal-like river by 21 September.

Puller committed elements of Lieutenant Colonel Thomas L. Ridge's 3d Battalion in the center, but a half dozen NKPA Maxim heavy machine guns took a grim toll of every attempt to cross the water gate sector of the Kalchon.

Ridge ordered Major Edwin H. Simmons, his Weapons Company commander, to suppress the fire. With his 81mm mortars temporarily out of ammunition and no

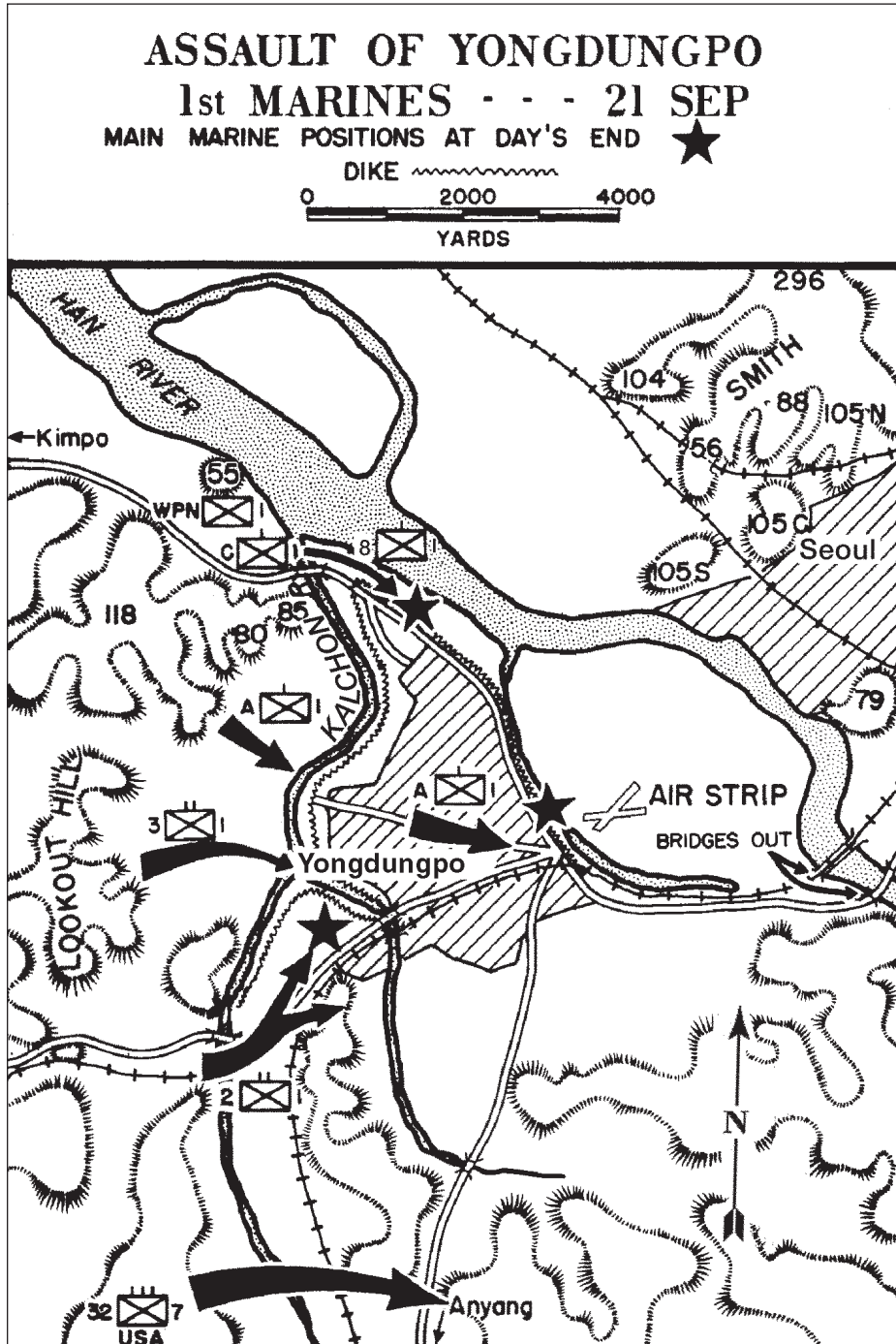
artillery support immediately available, Simmons chose his Browning M1917A1 watercooled .30-caliber heavy machine guns for the mission. Proven veterans of the World War, the heavy Brownings were unsurpassed in providing rock-steady, sustained fire at a rate of 450-600 rounds per minute. Simmons massed these weapons with their barrels "just clearing the top of the dike." A fierce duel

ensued—"heavies against heavies"—at an interval no greater than half a football field. The exchange was deafening, but Simmons' sturdy Brownings prevailed, allowing 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, to cross the Kalchon intact.

The Kalchon proved a barrier to the entire regiment on 21 September—with one memorable exception. While the battle raged on both sides—and shortly before Major Simmons' machine gun duel—Captain Robert H. Barrow, the future 27th Commandant, led his Company A, 1st Marines, through a rice field towards an uncommonly quiet sector of the Yongdungpo defenses. The North Koreans may have vacated this sector in order to more effectively contest the adjacent water gate fronting the 3d Battalion, an obvious crossing site. Barrow, however, expected to be hit at any moment. Simmons watched approvingly as Company A, 1st Marines, advanced past his immediate left flank, each platoon on line. "They were beautifully deployed," said Simmons. "As they came through the dry rice paddy I thought of the Marines coming through the wheat fields at Belleau Wood in 1918."

Private First Class Morgan Brainard of Barrow's company, though apprehensive about the spooky quiet, experienced similar thoughts as he crossed through the waist-high rice stalks. As he later described the advance:

Somewhere off to our left, beyond the road and out of sight, beyond a line of trees we could hear the rattle of rifle and machine gun fire where Baker Company was going in To our immediate front, however, there was nothing but silence, as we continued to move forward





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A3200

A column of M-26 Pershings and a bulldozer-configured M-4 Sherman advance towards Yongdungpo. The threat comes from the right flank, and firing has already been vigorous, judging from the spent 90mm shell casings alongside the road.

through the field in perfect order. It was a classic-type infantry advance . . . but my mind kept racing back toward the stories I had read as a boy of the Marines attacking through the wheat fields of

Belleau Wood . . . and I expected our peaceful scene would be shattered in a similar manner at any moment.

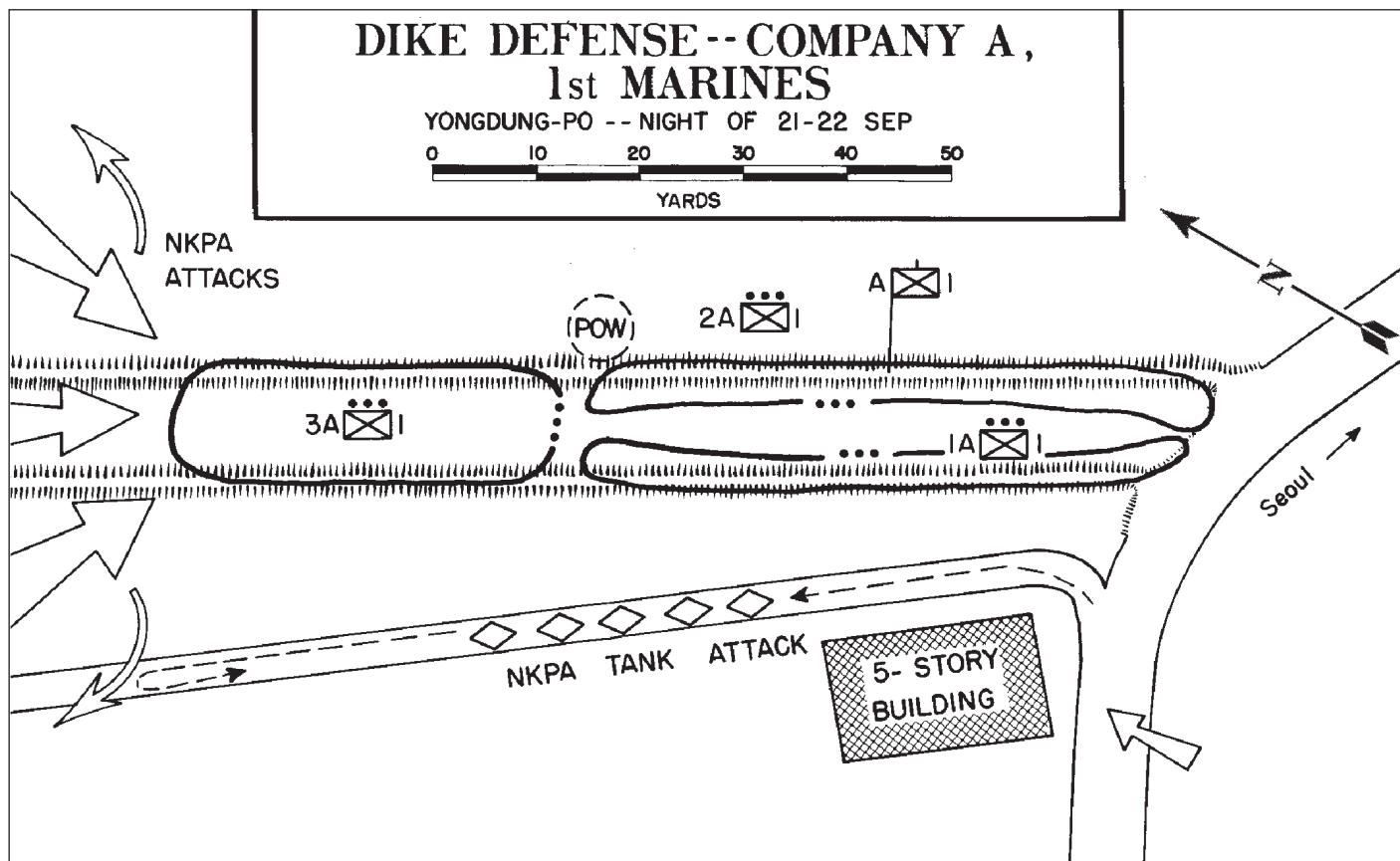
Captain Barrow acknowledged his serendipity. "We just happened

to experience one of those rare fortunes of war . . . a momentary opportunity."

"We passed over the top of the dike quickly, slithered down the other side," recalled Brainard, "then inexplicably and stupidly stopped facing a stream [the Kalchon]. I mean the whole line stopped." The company gunnery sergeant quickly ended their hesitation: "Get in that goddamned water!"

Company A found itself entering the main street of Yongdungpo totally unopposed. "It was eerie," said Barrow. "We simply slithered into town undetected."

The 87th NKPA Regiment, desperately attempting to patch together a defense in depth, had accidentally left this critical approach unguarded, and Barrow took full advantage of the opening. His 200-man company flowed rapidly into the heart of the city, sweeping up surprised bands of



the enemy in the process.

Before dark they had cut the city in two. Barrow selected a sausage-shaped dike, 30 feet high and 150 yards long, as the place to make a stand for the night. "We immediately recognized that we had a valuable piece of real estate," he said. From the dike his Marines could interdict the intersection of the highways from Inchon and Kimpo.

Through this intersection at one point marched a large formation of unsuspecting NKPA infantry, singing political songs as they hurried to reinforce Yongdungpo's

northwestern defenses. Barrow's interlocking machine guns and 60mm mortars cut down many and scattered the rest.

As darkness fell, Lieutenant Colonel Hawkins knew Barrow had executed a major penetration, but he could not reinforce this unexpected success. Barrow and Company A would be on their own—which was fine with Barrow. "We felt strong," he said. "We were not 'The Lost Company.'" "What followed," observed historian Jon T. Hoffman, "would become one of the great small-unit epics in the history of the Corps, to

rank with Hunt's Point and Pope's Ridge [at Peleliu]."

The NKPA attacked Company A shortly after dark with five Soviet-built T-34 tanks. The rattle and roar of their tracks as they approached almost unnerved Private First Class Morgan Brainard. "The squeaking and engine humming was drawing much closer, and as I crouched in my hole, I felt the ice-like shiver of pure fear." The tanks reached the intersection, then proceeded in column along a road parallel and extremely close to the Marines' positions dug into the side of the dike. The lead vehicle appeared enormous to Brainard: "In the moonlight I could see its turret with the long gun on it slowly circling back and forth, like some prehistoric, steel-backed monster sniffing for prey. I pressed tightly against the side of my hole, and waited for the flash and fire of its gun."

The tanks made five deliberate passes along that parallel track, firing their 85mm guns directly into the crowded dike from an ungodly short range of 25 yards. This was a terrifying experience for the Marines on the receiving end, but the dike's soft sand absorbed the base-detonated, armor-piercing shells, and there were few casualties. Meanwhile, Barrow's 3.5-inch rocket launcher teams stung the tanks repeatedly. "One of the most courageous acts that I ever witnessed was those brave young Marines with the 3.5s," he said. The first bazooka round Corporal Francis Devine ever fired in anger blasted a T-34 turret off its ring. Other gunners knocked out a second tank and damaged two more. The attached heavy machine gun section kept the vehicles buttoned up and peppered their vision blocks and periscopes. The surviving vehicles withdrew in disarray.

Navy surgeon and corpsmen attached to the 1st Marine Division treat a badly injured two-year-old boy on the outskirts of Seoul.

Photo by Frank Noel, Associated Press





Department of Defense Photo (USA) SC348715

Elements of the 5th Marines advance through a burning village after crossing the Han River. The days of high mobility ended as the Marines reached the enemy main line of resistance in the high ridges on the outskirts of Seoul.

The enemy tanks may have been more successful had infantry accompanied them, but the NKPA riflemen did not appear until 0100. Four separate ground assaults followed, each beaten back by disciplined fire. “I expected to have a lot of promiscuous firing,” said Barrow, but “my people didn’t lose their fire discipline and go bananas and shoot randomly.”

The enemy assembly area was so close to the Marines’ defensive position that they could hear the voice of the local commander, unmistakably haranguing his troops into launching another attack. Corporal Billy D. Webb, an Oklahoma reservist “with fire in his eye,” decided to even the odds. Slipping out of his foxhole—“for God’s sake don’t shoot me when I come back!”—Webb dashed through the adjoining maze of buildings, spotted an extremely animated officer trying to rally his troops for yet another attack, took careful aim, and shot him dead. Webb escaped in the resultant confusion, and the night assaults

ceased before the Marines ran out of ammunition.

At dawn, Barrow counted 210 dead North Koreans around his beleaguered dike. “Yongdungpo did for A Company,” said Barrow, “what no other thing could have done in terms of unifying it and giving it its own spirit, a spirit that said ‘We can do anything.’”

If Barrow’s company had “slithered” into Yongdungpo on the 21st, it was now the turn of the *87th NKPA Regiment*, having failed to oust the Marines throughout the night, to slither out of town the next morning. Barrow had skinned the cat, helping Puller capture a very difficult intermediate objective in two days of fighting. The road to Seoul for the 1st Marines now lay open, once the 5th Marines could advance eastward enough to cover their tactical crossing of the Han.

Back at Inchon, now well to the west of Puller’s regiment at Yongdungpo, the offloading of fresh troops and combat cargo continued around the clock. By

D+6, 21 September, 50,000 troops had landed, including Colonel Homer L. Litzenberg, Jr.’s 7th Marines, supported by Lieutenant Colonel Francis F. Parry’s 3d Battalion, 11th Marines, a 105mm howitzer outfit.

The 7th Marines initially assumed security duties in the Inchon vicinity. General O. P. Smith critically needed them for the recapture of Seoul, but the newly formed outfit first required a day or two to shake itself down from the long deployment by sea. This did not take long. Lieutenant Colonel Raymond G. Davis’ 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, for example, had conducted field firing from the fantail of their attack transport each day enroute. “We fired machine guns, rifles, mortars, and bullets, rocket launchers, and threw hand grenades at every piece of trash, orange crates, or whatever the ship’s crew would toss overboard for us,” said Davis. Within 48 hours the regiment moved out tactically, crossed the Han River, and began its own path towards Seoul’s northern suburbs, somewhat northwest of the route of the 5th Marines. On the third day Parry’s gunners fired their first rounds down range.

By the fortunes of war, the 5th Marines would pay the stiffest price of admission to enter Seoul. General MacArthur’s beguiling assurance to Lieutenant Colonel Murray that the hills guarding the northwestern approaches to the capital “would all evaporate” proved famously false. The regiment would suffer a casualty rate more reflective of its recent history at Peleliu and Okinawa than the Korean peninsula.

Part of the difficulty came from the convoluted terrain, a sprawling series of hill masses, ridges, and draws extending from the Kaesong-Seoul highway in the

north to the Han River in the south. "As an exercise in map reading," observed Marine historian Colonel Robert D. Heinl, Jr., "this ground is confusing and deceptive; for the tactician, it is a nightmare." Massive Hill 296 dominated the landscape; indeed, many of the other numbered peaks and knobs were in reality only protuberances of the hill's bony fingers extending to the Han and eastward into downtown Seoul itself. Confusingly, there were three Hill 105s in this complex (just as there had been three Hill 362s at Iwo Jima). Regimental planners nicknamed them for their linear sequence—Hills 105 North, Center, and South. All three would prove prickly objectives to seize and hold.

The North Koreans found the jumbled terrain around the Hill 296 complex to be ideal defensive

ground. The fact that the Japanese had long used the same ridges for tactical training meant the preexisting availability of firing positions, command posts, and observation sites. Colonel Wol Ki Chan reached this preferred ground with his *25th NKPA Brigade* and Colonel Pak Han Lin's *78th Independent Infantry Regiment* just in time. Had the North Koreans been held up one more day passing through Seoul, the Marines might have seized Hill 296 and all of its deadly fingers with hardly a fight.

Colonels Wol and Pak deployed at least 6,000 troops into the hill complex. While yet to be tested in battle, the combined force was both well-led and well-trained. Wol's brigade also contained an abundance of heavy weapons units. Their crews spent the 20th and 21st digging in their weapons

and registering their fire along the Marines' likely avenues of approach. Additional troops in odd-lot specialty organizations reinforced Wol during the battle for the hills, increasing his total force to nearly 10,000 men. The 5th Marines, even reinforced by their attachments and the ROK Marine battalion, could not match those numbers.

The 5th Marines had fought against highly experienced NKPA regiments in the Pusan Perimeter, units whose officers and non-commissioned officers had years of combat experience in China. The North Koreans they now faced lacked that background but made up for it with tenacity and firepower, including well-served high-velocity 76mm guns and 120mm heavy mortars. "Their mortar fire was very accurate," said veteran company commander Captain

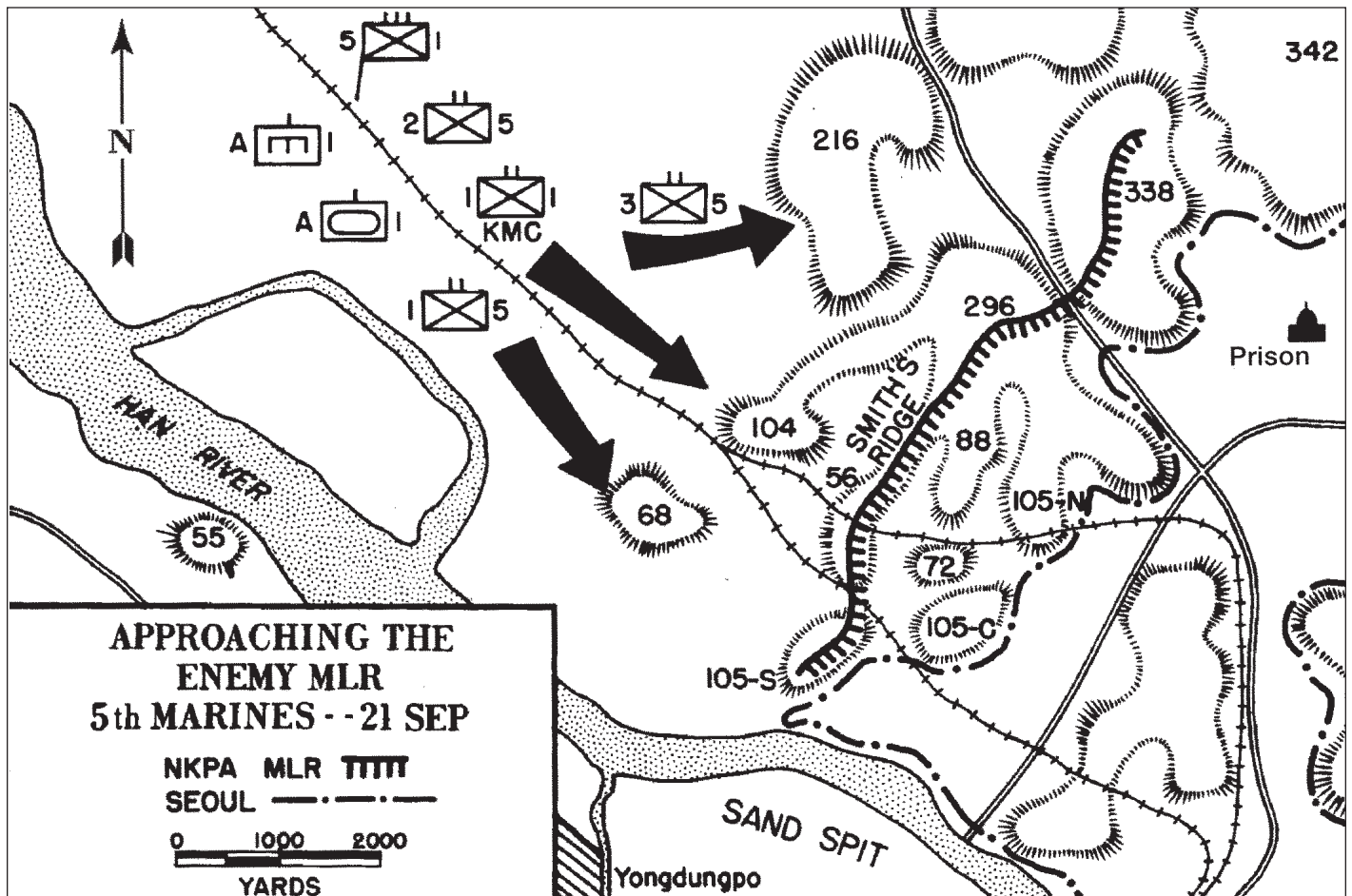




Photo by David Douglas Duncan

Capt Francis I. "Ike" Fenton, Jr., commanding Company B, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, experienced unremitting fire taking and holding Hill 105-South just outside the city limits.

Francis I. "Ike" Fenton, Jr. "They could really drop it in your lap."

Lieutenant Colonel Raymond Murray began the 22d of September with three of his four battalions on line: Taplett's 3d Battalion on the left, facing the main crest of Hill 296; Major Ko's 1st ROK Marine Battalion in the center, facing an exposed slope towards its objective, Hill 56; and Lieutenant Colonel George R. Newton's 1st Battalion on the right, aimed towards Hill 105-South. Lieutenant Colonel Harold S. Roise's 2d Battalion remained in reserve.

The battle for the hills got off to a bad start for Murray. During the night a North Korean shell exploded in his command post, causing many casualties. Murray survived

with a small cut, but Lieutenant Colonel Lawrence C. Hays, his executive officer and fellow Tarawa veteran (1st Battalion, 8th Marines commanding officer at Red Beach Two), was badly hit and required emergency evacuation.

Murray nevertheless kicked off his regimental attack at 0700 on the 22d as planned. Taplett's 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, clawed its way steadily towards the steep crest of Hill 296, shaking off plunging fire from Communist positions north of the Kaesong Highway (the 7th Marines would not draw abreast to clear these positions along the left flank for another three days). Taplett's Marines maintained a steady rate of advance, the most promising of the

week, halting only to resist company-sized counterattacks that boiled out of the draws and defiles along the shoulders of the hill mass.

Company H, 5th Marines, reached the hill's geographic crest by the end of the day. Corporal Larry Brom's platoon commander directed him to deploy his squad in a defensive sector along a grove of pine trees, and Brom supervised his men as they dug night positions and selected interlocking fields of fire. Satisfied with their preparations, he took off his pack and unfolded his e-tool (entrenching tool) to dig his own hole for the night. The squad had been uncommonly fortunate, Brom reflected, having lost only one man to enemy fire throughout the fighting along the Naktong, at Wolmi-

do Island, and the advance east of Inchon. Here on Hill 296 their luck abruptly soured. A North Korean sniper shot Brom through the foot just after he knelt to unslung his pack. More fire sprayed the ridge crest. A gray-headed Korean "papa-san" scurried to Brom's side, scooped him up, and carried him piggyback down the reverse slope under intermittent fire to the battalion aid station. Brom gave him a fresh pack of cigarettes, all he possessed at the time. The old man bowed in gratitude, then returned back up the hill. For Corporal Brom, a two-year veteran of the 5th Marines, the war was over.

The incident of a Marine squad leader being picked off from long range at dusk by a North Korean sniper signified two developments. The NKPA had deployed front-line troops west of Seoul. Secondly, although the Marines had seized the crest of Hill 296, the North Koreans occupied defenses in depth throughout its massive fingers descending to the east and south.

The situation south of 3d Battalion, 5th Marines' advance validated these serious developments. On the 22d, the Korean Marine battalion encountered a furious fire from masked guns in every adjoining declivity each time it mounted an attack. Its objective was deceptive. Captain Fenton, operating on the Koreans' right flank, described Hill 56 as "a very insignificant looking low ridge that extended from 296 to 105-South." But the Koreans were advancing from low ground, through rice fields, exposed every step of the way to unrelenting artillery and mortar fire.

Murray directed Lieutenant Colonel Ransom M. Wood's supporting 1st Battalion, 11th Marines, to give the Koreans priority of

fires. He also asked General Smith for more air support. This was forthcoming—the 1st Marines were mopping up Yongdungpo and the 7th Marines were not yet engaged. Major Arnold A. Lund led his Death Rattlers of VMF-323 off the escort carrier *Badoeng Strait* (CVE 116), which the aviators lovingly nicknamed "The Bing-Ding," in 42 sorties in support of the 5th Marines, the heaviest operational rate since D-Day at Inchon. Lieutenant Colonel Norman J. Anderson, the airborne tactical air controller for Marine Aircraft Group 33 (MAG-33), directed the strikes, then led one himself, a spectacular direct hit on Hill 72 (by now "Nellie's Tit" to the 5th Marines) that knocked out one of Colonel Wol's few tanks. Additional air strikes came from the newly arrived, Kimpo-based Lancers of VMF-212, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Richard W. Wyczawski and Lieutenant Colonel Max J. Volcansek, Jr.'s night-fighting Tigers of VMF(N)-542.

This was spectacular close air support—unerringly directed and delivered—and many North Koreans met their deaths from the skies, but their withering crossfire never ceased. The Korean Marines were literally stopped in their tracks. The advance of Newton's 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, on the right flank fared better, but only in relative terms. Attacking across 2,000 yards of open terrain cost Companies A and C dearly. The Marines found that one particularly deadly NKPA outpost contained a U.S. Browning .50-caliber heavy machine gun, captured during the first week of the war. Company A lost its last two officer platoon commanders in the assault. The cost was endemic with the 5th Marines. Seventeen of the regiment's original 18 platoon commanders had been killed or

wounded in the first 50 days of combat in Korea, along with five of the six company commanders. Experienced non-commissioned officers took command of the platoons in Company A and continued the attack on Hill 105-South.

Captain "Ike" Fenton led Company B through Company A late in the day, then, leaning into a furious barrage from 1st Battalion, 11th Marines, joined Company C's dash for the crest of 105-South. It was a hollow victory. The battalion had suffered more than 40 casualties, and the enemy had mysteriously disappeared—"there were no bodies, not even any cartridge cases lying around," reported Fenton. Only later would the Marines discover the existence of a large cave on the hill's reverse slope, now a sanctuary for the former defenders, living and dead. In the meantime, punishing fire from the hills to the northeast began to rake the Marines exposed on the crest. As Heinl described Hill 105-South:

[The hill] was no vacation spot. Before the sun set, enemy heavy machine guns began to scythe back and forth over the hilltop, while antitank guns, accurate as a sniper's rifle and a lot deadlier, flash-banged in with high-velocity rounds that left no time for a man to duck.

This was an unwelcome development to Fenton, who had lost only one killed and six wounded in his assault on the hill. Now, despite digging new foxholes along the military crest, his men would suffer stiff casualties from their hostile neighbors. "We were pinned down by day and counter-attacked by night," he said. To make matters worse, the Korean Marines' lack of progress left 1st

Marine Close Air Support in the Recapture Of Seoul

“I believe the modern ‘Marine Air-Ground Team’ truly takes its departure from the crucible of the Korean War,” reflected retired Lieutenant General Robert P. Keller, USMC, in a recent interview. Keller took command of the VMF-214 Black Sheep after North Korean anti-aircraft gunners shot down Lieutenant Colonel Walter E. Lischeid over Seoul on 25 September 1950. Comparing this experience with his World War II service as a fighter pilot and squadron commander in the northern Solomons, Keller pointed to the emergence of close air support in the Korean War—“by Marines, for Marines”—as the principal difference. While ground Marines had enjoyed Marine air support at Peleliu, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa, it was never delivered more closely, nor more responsively than that provided by the F4U Corsairs of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing throughout the final four months of 1950, from the Pusan Perimeter through Inchon-Seoul to the Chosin Reservoir.

Major General Norman J. Anderson credited the success of this air support coordination to the hard work performed by Marine air and ground officers in the short interwar period. “The Marine Corps, having learned valuable lessons late in World War II, went to extremes in the late ‘40s to school its air and ground officers together and to structure its deployments as air-ground teams under a single command,” he said. “This new

structure served us well, then and ever since, beginning with the air-ground composition of the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade.”

Of the four Marine fighter squadrons and two night fighter squadrons supporting the 1st Marine Division during the 33-day period from 7 September to 9 October, the Death Rattlers of VMF-323, commanded by Major Arnold A. Lund, saw more days in action and flew the most combat sorties (784, according to the official Marine Corps history of the Seoul campaign). The record comes with a bittersweet irony. The squadron had been in the process of a mandated deactivation when the war erupted, its pilots reassigned, its planes transferred for preservation. Saved at the last moment from the draconian cutbacks of the Truman Administration, the Death Rattlers reassembled in record time. During the Seoul campaign they launched from the escort carrier *Badoeng Strait* (CVE 116) in the Sea of Japan on missions ranging from reconnaissance to propaganda leaflet drops, but their most frequent mission by an order of magnitude was close air support.

The Black Sheep pilots of VMF-214 flew off the escort carrier *Sicily* (CVE 118), commanded by the legendary naval aviator Captain John S. Thach, USN, a World War II ace who in 1941 invented the “Thach Weave” to counter the Japanese Zero’s technical superiority over

Photo Courtesy of LtCol Leo J. Ihli, USMC (Ret)



the F4F Wildcats. Thach became an enthusiastic advocate of Marine close air support. "It's like having artillery right over your shoulder!" he said. During the Seoul Campaign, Thach would often leave the bridge to attend the Black Sheep post-mission debriefings. "They took their work seriously. They really were the top pros in the business, I think, in the whole world. I had tremendous admiration for them."

So did the commanding general of the 1st Marine Division. "The effectiveness of the Marine air-ground team and close air support doctrine were reaffirmed with outstanding success," wrote Major General Oliver P. Smith after the liberation of Seoul.

For the troops on the ground, struggling to prevail against a well-armed enemy they could rarely see in the open, the firepower delivered by their fellow Marines overhead seemed awesome. Lieutenant Joseph R. Owen, the mortar platoon commander in Company B, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, described his first experience with a close air strike during the battalion's battle for a ridge south of Uijongbu:

The first of the gull-winged, dark blue Corsairs peeled from the circle and dove at the white smoke. Red tracers from its guns poured from the forward edges of the wings. The plane leveled off only yards above the ridgeline. We could see the pilot in the cockpit and the big, white Marine Corps emblem on the fuselage. . . . Then the [next] plane came in, this one dropping a pod of napalm. The black, coffin-shaped canister hit the ground, skipped a few feet above the surface, and exploded into a wall of flame that extended the length of the North Koreans' position. Two hundred yards below, we felt the shock of its explosion and a wave of searing heat.

While equally appreciative of the aviators' precision and valor, veteran infantry officer Captain Francis I. "Ike" Fenton, Jr., commanding Company B, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, suggested even deadlier aerial firepower that could uproot North Koreans who took shelter in caves or railroad tunnels, as the 5th Marines experienced in the extended battle for Hill 105-South. "The close air support in Korea by the Marine Corps was outstanding," Fenton said. "However, I would like to see Marine aviation come up with a rocket with a napalm head. This rocket would be great for getting into tunnels, or into caves....The Koreans showed great fear for fire bombs....I believe a big rocket, maybe a Tiny Tim, that could carry a fairly good quantity of napalm, would be an excellent weapon."

Major General Field Harris' 1st Marine Aircraft Wing also provided close air support to the 7th Infantry Division, the other major component in X Corps during

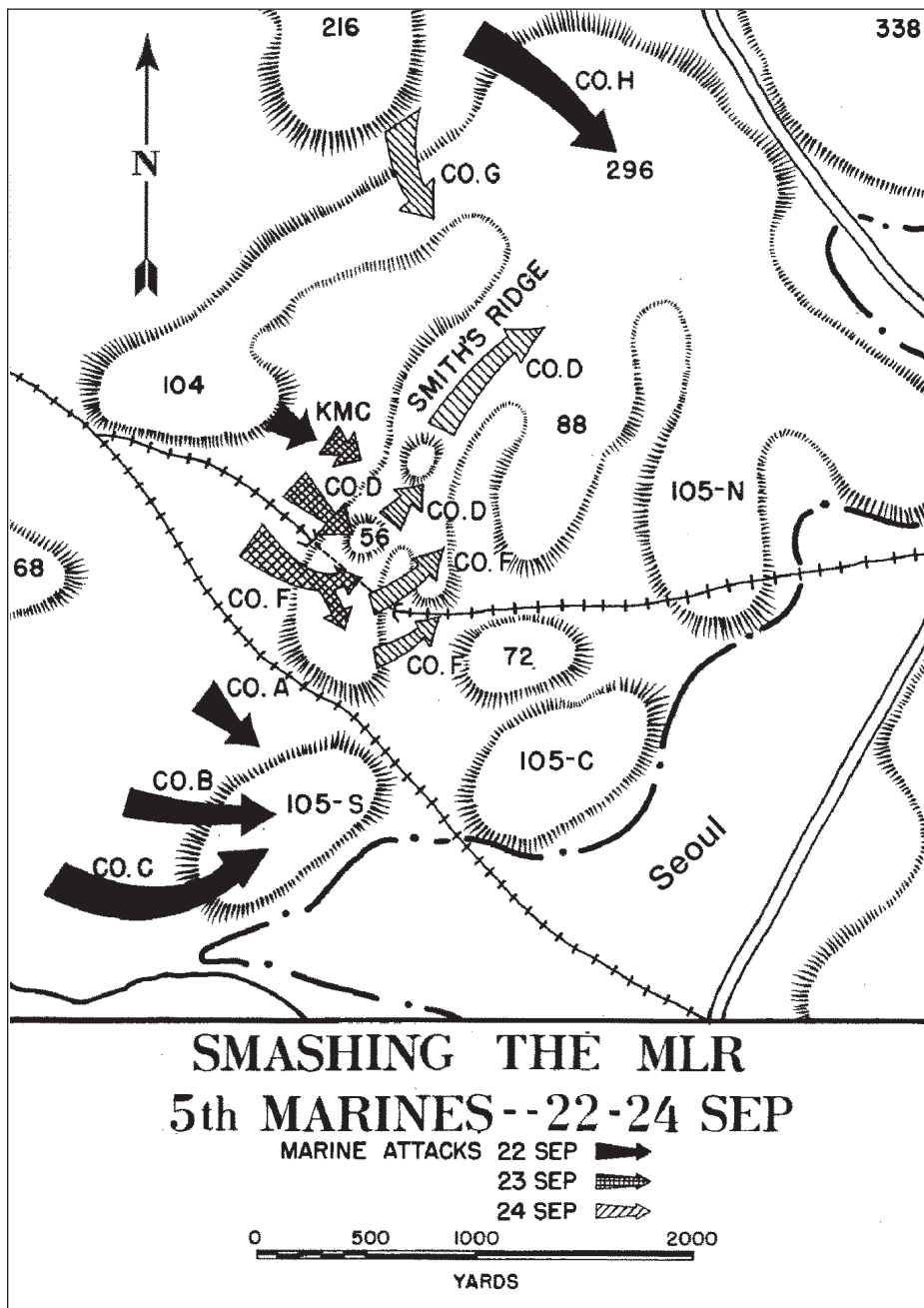
the Seoul campaign. Superbly assisted by Marine Captain Charles E. Crew's Far East Detachment, Air and Naval Gunfire Liaison Company, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing flew 1,024 sorties in support of the Army division in 57 days without a single casualty to front-line friendly troops, despite bombing and strafing runs as close as 200 yards. Brigadier General Homer W. Kiefer, USA, commanding the 7th Division's artillery, wrote an appreciative letter to the Commandant, stating: "The Marine system of control, in my estimation, approaches the ideal, and I firmly believe that a similar system should be adopted as standard for Army Divisions."

The Korean War as a whole would advance military aviation fully into the Jet Age, and soon the U.S. Air Force would wage epic air-to-air battles between its F-86 Sabers and the Soviet-built (and often Soviet-flown) MIG-15 fighters. Eventually the Marines would introduce in the skies over Korea their own jet fighter, the Grumman F9F-2 Panther, well armed for both air-to-air and air-to-ground missions. It was also the dawn of the Helicopter Age, and VMO-6 made military aviation history when it deployed to Pusan with the 1st Marine Brigade in August 1950 with four Sikorsky HO3S-1 helicopters.

By contrast the propeller-driven Corsair was now considered old and slow, hampered by a light payload capacity and too small a fuel tank. Landing the high-rise "U-birds" on the pitching deck of an escort carrier remained "adventurous," especially with the ship steaming westerly into a setting sun. "That bright red ball seemed to be sitting right on the fan-tail," General Keller recalled, "and it was difficult to make out the Landing Signal Officer, his signals, or even the deck." General Anderson cited another common hazard when trying to land an F4U into a setting sun: "The Corsair frequently managed to splatter the windshield with oil!"

Yet the Corsair in good hands proved highly reliable and durable for its age and the operating conditions. The hard-working maintenance crews of VMF-214 somehow averaged 95 percent availability of the Black Sheep Corsairs throughout the Pusan-Inchon-Seoul campaigns. And in the absence of a jet-propelled enemy air threat during those two months, the Corsair proved an invaluable contributor to the allied victories.

Certainly the ground Marines fighting towards Seoul or Uijongbu in the autumn of 1950 were very comfortable with the presence overhead of their protective Corsair, their familiar old "bent-wing widow-maker," the attack aircraft the Japanese in the previous war allegedly nicknamed "The Whistling Death." There is no record of what nickname the North Koreans may have used, but judging from the ever-increasing intensity of their ground fire the moment the F4Us swept into view, it was probable the Corsairs held their highest respect, as well.



Battalion, 5th Marines' left flank fully exposed. Newton had to peel a company back to the starting position, and the day ended on that sour note.

Lieutenant Colonel Murray ordered the Korean Marines to resume their assault on Hill 56 the morning of 23 September, but try as they might the ROK troops were stopped cold by heavy fire. No one then realized that Colonel Wol had established his main line of resistance along the low ridge that

passed through Hill 56. The insignificant-looking rise would become known as Smith's Ridge the following day.

Murray committed his reserve, ordering Lieutenant Colonel Roise to pass through the Koreans with 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, and continue the attack. Roise deployed Captain Uel D. Peters' Company F on the right and First Lieutenant H. J. "Hog Jaw" Smith's Company D on the left. Hugging the terrain and advancing by squad rushes,

both companies were able in time to approach the higher ground with acceptable casualties, yet both suffered heavily in the close-in fighting that followed. This took the balance of the afternoon.

George Newton's 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, had all it could handle that day and night just maintaining its exposed forward position on Hill 105-South. In two days spent clinging to the hill's fire-swept crest, Companies B and C suffered 24 casualties. "All these men were hit in their foxholes," said Captain Fenton. "There was no way to keep the enemy from delivering plunging fire right in on top of us."

Robert Taplett's 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, also had its hands full throughout the 23d in repelling NKPA counterattacks against the crest of Hill 296 and trying to establish fire superiority against the enemy on a half-dozen circling hills. Clearly visible at one of these Communist strongpoints was a tall, fair-skinned officer with a charmed life, "Fireproof Phil." He may have been a Soviet military advisor, but whoever he was, Fireproof Phil exhibited unflinching disdain for Marine marksmanship. When riflemen, mortarmen, and artillerymen failed to knock him down, Taplett ordered up an M-26 Pershing tank. Sniping at Phil with a 90mm gun proved equally futile. The man dodged every round and kept exhorting his gunners to return fire until darkness shrouded the scene. The Marines never saw him again.

The 2d Battalion held Hill 56 throughout the night, but only by its collective fingernails. The assault companies were scattered and vulnerable. Lieutenant Colonel Max Volcansek's faithful night fighters circling overhead helped even the odds, but Marine artillery provided the greatest assistance. Wood's 1st Battalion, 11th Marines, fired all night long, illuminating the

scorched battlefield and interdicting potential NKPA assembly areas. "I can't say enough about the artillery support we received that night," said Second Lieutenant Tilton A. Anderson, whose platoon had been reduced to seven men in the afternoon's fighting. "It was magnificent."

Major General Almond, the X Corps commander, grew impatient with the 1st Marine Division's slow progress north of the Han. Pressured by MacArthur to recapture Seoul by the third-month anniversary of the invasion, and mindful that the North Koreans would be fortifying the capital to a greater extent each day, Almond urged O. P. Smith to deploy the 1st Marines well beyond Yongdungpo to attack Seoul from the southeast. Almond's operations officer reflected his commander's impatience, saying: "The Marines were exasperatingly deliberate at a time when rapid maneuver was imperative."

Smith disagreed. Seizing Inchon against rear-echelon troops had been a relative cakewalk. Things had changed. The tenacity and firepower of the North Koreans battling the 5th Marines reminded Smith more of the Japanese at Peleliu or Okinawa. Seizing Seoul would therefore not be quick and easy, Smith argued, and the last thing he wanted was to wage that battle with his major components divided by the Han and attacking towards each other. Almond acquiesced to this logic, but he also decided to bring in Colonel Charles E. Beauchamp's 32d Infantry of the Army's 7th Infantry Division to attack the city from the southeast. Seoul would no longer be the sole province of the 1st Marine Division. Smith agreed to move Puller's 1st Marines across the Han the next morning, then loan the 1st Amphibian Tractor



Sketch by John DeGrasse

The 5th Marines learned tank-infantry coordination under intense pressure in the Pusan Perimeter. Here, attacking North Korean positions along the ridges outside Seoul, a fire team keeps up with its assigned Pershing tank.

Battalion to X Corps to transport the 32d Infantry and the 17th ROK Regiment across the tidal river the following day.

Smith knew that Almond on his daily visits to the front-line regiments had taken to giving operational orders directly to Murray and Chesty Puller. In a heated private session, Smith asked Almond to knock it off. "If you'll give your orders to me," Smith said icily, "I'll see that they are carried out." Neither of Almond's division commanders, however, would successfully cure the commanding general of his impetuosity.

General Smith directed Puller to make his crossing slightly west of Yongdungpo, turn right, enter the city along the north bank, then execute a difficult pivot movement, wheeling the regiment north. Smith planned for Murray's 5th Marines to fight their way into the northwest sector of the city

while Litzenberg's 7th Marines sealed off the NKPA access routes along the entire northern boundary. It was an ambitious and complicated plan. But the first order of business remained the destruction of the *25th NKPA Brigade* in the fortified barrier ridges to the northwest.

The battle for these ridges reached its climax on 24 September. The day broke with a low-lying mist, as Companies D and F arrayed themselves for the assault. Artillery preparations began at 0610. Company F jumped off 20 minutes later, seized the eastern end of the troublesome railroad tunnel, paused to allow a Corsair strike by the Lancers of VMF-212 (who would establish a 1st Marine Aircraft Wing record of 46 sorties this date), then dashed across the low ground to capture the heavily fortified eastern finger. This represented an encouraging

start, but Company F was spent, having suffered more than a hundred casualties around the south edge of Hill 56 in the past 24 hours. Among the dead was Corporal Welden D. Harris, who had killed three North Korean soldiers in hand-to-hand fighting and been twice wounded the day before. Company F had given its all. Now it was all up to “Hog Jaw” Smith and Company D.

The recapture of Seoul would obviously require a team effort—Marines and Army, ground forces and air squadrons. But the keys to Seoul’s access really came from two Marine rifle companies, Captain Robert Barrow’s Company A, 1st Marines, at Yongdungpo during 21-22 September, and Captain H. J. Smith’s Company D, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, during the 23d-24th.

Company D faced the greater challenge. Captain Smith had to attack about 750 yards to the

northeast across an open saddle, seize an extremely well-defended knoll, and continue beyond along an increasingly wooded ridge. This contested real estate became Smith’s Ridge. Easily a thousand NKPA troops defended this terrain, well covered by the same sharpshooting gunners who had been making life so miserable for the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, on Hill 105-South.

Smith began the day with a good-sized rifle company, but the mission required a battalion. Lieutenant Colonel Roise—who would join the ranks of the wounded this day but refuse evacuation—withheld Captain Samuel Jaskilka’s Company E to exploit Smith’s expected breakthrough and roll up the last hills to the east.

Captain Smith sensed what he faced and relied heavily on supporting arms, adding to the artillery fire missions and air strikes his own machine guns, mortars,

and rocket launchers. Twice he punched ahead; twice he had to withdraw with heavy casualties. Nor did a flank attack succeed. An 11-man squad worked east then attacked north. The North Koreans shot them down to a man. Abruptly Smith’s company was down to 44 Marines, including the 60mm mortar section, now out of ammunition and doubling as riflemen.

By this time, the 11th Marines had been bombarding the ridgelines and reverse slopes of the objective for more than 24 hours. Ten Marine Corsairs from the Death Rattlers had rotated on station since sunrise, bombing, strafing, and dropping napalm canisters along the objective. Yet Colonel Wol’s antiaircraft gunners had taken a toll: five of the Corsairs received extensive damage. Smith knew he was down to his final opportunity.

Smith called for a four-plane firing run, asking that the fourth Corsair execute a low but dummy pass to keep the enemy in their holes until the last possible moment. Major Lund’s Corsair pilots flew this mission beautifully. As the third plane roared overhead Smith leapt to his feet screaming “follow me!” His Marines swept forward just beneath the last Corsair’s low-level, ear-splitting run.

“Over they went,” described Captain Nicholas A. Canzona of the engineer battalion in a 1956 *Marine Corps Gazette* account, “yelling wildly and firing their rifles, carbines, and BARs [Browning automatic rifles]. They entered upon a scene of carnage stretching out in every direction. Driving forward through the human wreckage, they shot and bayoneted anything that moved.”

“Hog Jaw” Smith died at the bitter end, becoming Company D’s

All it took was one North Korean prisoner of war to whip a pistol or grenade from under his loose clothing and attack his captor. Thereafter the Marines took no chances. Naked prisoners proceed under armed guard past a destroyed T-34 tank to a prison camp.

National Archives Photo (USA) 111-SC349027



36th fatality of the assault. Seizing Smith's Ridge in fact cost the company 178 casualties of the 206 men who had advanced across the valley the previous day. But the reverse slopes of the complex looked like a charnel house. The surviving Marines began to count the windrows of NKPA bodies, most blasted hideously by Marine 105mm howitzers, Corsairs, and mortars. They reached 1,500 and had to stop counting; the task was too gruesome.

Company D had knocked down the center door to the *25th NKPA Brigade's* defenses, but more savage fighting remained to clear the final path to Seoul. Captain Jaskilka's fresh Company E moved through the gap between the remnants of Companies D and F, but encountered an extensive minefield and stubborn resistance on Nelly's Tit and Hill 105-Central beyond. The division engineers cleared the mines, but ridding the last hills of their die-hard defenders took Jaskilka another 24 hours. Lieutenant Colonel Taplett's 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, had a correspondingly difficult time snuffing out Hill 105-North. In close combat reminiscent of the Central Pacific in World War II, most of the enemy chose to die in place. Colonel Wol's fate remained unknown, presumed dead.

The 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, managed to maintain its precarious hold on the crest of 105-South while at the same time dispatching a large combat patrol down to the river to cover the crossing of Puller's 1st Marines. The nefarious hill would still represent a hornet's nest to all would-be occupants. It would take a combined assault by the 1st and 5th Marines and an armored column to close the cave and cut down the final defenders later that day.

The 5th Marines' three-day bat-



National Archives Photo (USA) 111-SC349090

A wounded Marine is carried down from the front lines on the ridges northwest of Seoul. The 5th Marines' three-day battle for the ridges made the uneventful crossing of the Han by the 1st Marines possible.

tle for the northwestern ridges made possible a surprisingly uneventful tactical crossing of the Han by the 1st Marines. The 2d and 3d Battalions crossed by LVTs; the 1st Battalion and Puller's command group made the crossing in DUKW amphibious trucks. NKPA opposition proved negligible. Lieutenant Colonel Henry P. "Jim" Crowe, who had created order out of chaos seven years earlier on Tarawa's Red Beach Three, swiftly deployed his 1st Shore Party Battalion along the landing site to keep troops and cargo moving inland, avoiding a dangerous bottleneck. Puller hustled his battal-

ions eastward into the city, growling at the long time it would take his Pershing tanks to cross at the Haengju ferry further downstream and work their way back along the north bank.

General Smith finally had all three of his infantry regiments north of the Han and roughly in line. This same day, Lieutenant Colonel Litzenberg's 7th Marines experienced its first significant combat against an NKPA outpost to the northwest of Seoul. For Second Lieutenant Joseph R. Owen, commanding the 60mm mortar section in Company B, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, the moment

Marine Combat Vehicles in the Seoul Campaign

The Marines mostly fought the first months of the Korean War with hand-me-down weapons and equipment from World War II stockpiles. In the case of combat vehicles, however, the Corps invested in two critical upgrades that provided a tactical edge in the recapture of Seoul: the M-26 Pershing medium tank and the LVT-3C amphibian tractor.

The sturdy M-4 Sherman tank had served the Marines well in the Pacific War from Tarawa through Okinawa, and by 1950 the tank battalions in the Fleet Marine Force were still equipped with the M-4A3-E8 "Easy Eight" version, featuring a 105mm gun. Yet the Sherman's success in the Pacific War was deceptive. Japanese tanks had provided no particular threat, the vehicle's narrow track width and high ground pressure had posed mobility problems in marginal terrain, and the Sherman's notoriously thin side and rear armor protection had proven inadequate against the enemy's 47mm antitank guns. The Sherman's prospects did not look favorable against the battle-proven T-34 medium tanks that the Soviet Union exported to client states like North Korea at the onset of the Cold War.

The Marines had foresightedly invested in the Army's acquisition of the M-26 Pershing 90mm-gun tank late in World War II. Their vehicles did not arrive in time for combat validation in Okinawa; nor could the postwar Corps afford to place them into operation, so the Pershings sat for several years in contingency reserve at the Marine supply base in Barstow, California.

When the Korean War erupted, the Commandant

ordered the 1st Tank Battalion to deploy with the new Pershings in lieu of its Sherman "Easy Eights." The hasty transition was not pretty, especially in the case of the reinforced company assigned to the 1st Brigade for its early-July deployment. Few tankers had the opportunity for hands-on operation and maintenance training. The gunners were lucky to be able to fire two rounds each—and they had to use the more abundantly available 90mm antiaircraft rounds instead of the new but scarce high-velocity armor-piercing munitions. And since none of the new Marine Pershings were configured as flamethrowers or dozer-blade variants, the battalion sailed with an awkward mixture of old Shermans along with the M-26s, the making of a logistical nightmare.

The ragged transition made for an inauspicious combat debut for the Marine M-26s in Korea. Operating in the Pusan Perimeter southwest corner, one Pershing broke through the planking of a critical bridge, heightening fears that its 46-ton weight would prove too heavy for Korea's road network. A second vehicle threw a track while fording a stream, blocking the crossing. Things improved. The Marine Pershings established their dominance in a head-to-head engagement against T-34s in the first battle of the Naktong Bulge, then continued to sweep the field as the 1st Marine Division advanced on Seoul. The Sherman blade and flame variants also contributed materially, especially in the close engagement waged by Baker Company's tanks against cave-infested Hill 105-South on 25 September.

A Marine LVT-3C Bushmaster from the 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion transfers troops to an LCVP.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A162956





National Archives Photo (USA) 111-SC348713

In the battle of downtown Seoul, the Pershings of Lieutenant Colonel Harry T. Milne's 1st Tank Battalion provided the crucial edge, time and again crashing through the North Korean barricades despite intense fire from the enemy's ubiquitous 45mm antitank guns. The battalion's War Diary for September reported the destruction of 13 NKPA tanks (which may have included several 76mm self-propelled guns) and 56 antitank guns or antiaircraft guns being fired horizontally at the approaching Pershings. The battalion lost five Pershings and one each of the flame and dozer Shermans in the recapture of Seoul.

The LVT-3C Bushmaster proved to be another smart investment for the Marines. Borg Warner's original LVT-3 had developed slowly during World War II, reaching the Fleet Marine Force out of numerical sequence and more than a year behind rival Food Machinery Corp. LVT-4. Borg Warner built nearly 3,000 Bushmasters for the Marine Corps. The first vehicles arrived in time for the Okinawa invasion in the spring of 1945.

The Bushmaster was a welcome addition to the Marines' ship-to-shore team. Like its FMC predecessor, the Bushmaster came with a hinged rear ramp and sufficient cargo space to accommodate either a jeep or a 105mm howitzer. By mounting its twin Cadillac V-8 engines along the sides of both hulls, the Borg Warner engineers provided the Bushmaster with a cargo capacity that exceeded the LVT-4's by 3,000 pounds.

Faced with the need to upgrade their amphibian tractor fleet during the austere late 1940s, the Marines opted to modernize 1,200 low-mileage LVT-3s by raising the sides, installing aluminum covers over the troop/cargo compartment, and installing a small machine gun turret atop the cab. The Marines designated their newly mod-

ified vehicle the LVT-3C, and it proved remarkably well suited for both salt-water and fresh-water operations throughout the Korean peninsula. (The Republic of China Marine Corps employed American-built LVT-3Cs on Taiwan for a quarter of a century after the Korean War).

The Bushmasters of Lieutenant Colonel Erwin F. Wann, Jr.'s 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion delivered Marines ashore at Inchon, transported each regiment plus the Army and ROK regiments across the Han under fire, and served as armored personnel carriers and cargo vehicles overland.

The 1st Marine Division was similarly well-supported by the versatile DUKWs of the 1st Amphibian Truck Company, an element of Lieutenant Colonel Olin L. Beall's 1st Motor Transport Battalion. (DUKW is not an acronym but an arcane industrial code used in World War II meaning an all-wheel-drive utility vehicle with twin rear wheel axles manufactured in 1942—"DUCKS" to Marines!)

Unfortunately the Marines fought the Inchon-Seoul campaign without the 1st Armored Amphibian Battalion. General Smith left the battalion with the division's rear echelon in Kobe as a temporary repository for the 500-plus, 17-year-olds ruled ineligible for combat by the Secretary of the Navy on the eve of the Inchon landing. The X Corps commander partially offset this lost capability by attaching the Army's Company A, 56th Amphibian Tractor Battalion, to the Marines. The Army company's 18 LVTA-5s equipped with snub-nosed 75mm howitzers spearheaded each river crossing, thereby proving themselves worthy recipients of the Presidential Unit Citation subsequently awarded the 1st Marine Division.



Painting by Col Charles H. Waterhouse, USMCR (Ret)

“First Firefight Above Seoul, B/1/7” portrays the intensity of night action that greeted the 7th Marines as they advanced to cut the roads leading north from Seoul.

was unforgettable:

The North Korean mortars came. Spouts of earth and black smoke leaped about us, laced with flame and screaming shrapnel. The leaves from the bean plants spun in flurries, and the ground shook. I was suddenly in the midst of a frenzied storm of noise.

By the nature of their northern mission the 7th Marines would have scant contact with the other elements of the 1st Marine Division in the fight for Seoul. The other two regiments, however, would experience a dangerous interface, the 1st Marines attacking north through the heart of the city, the 5th Marines coming in from the northwest.

Concerned with the inherent risks facing these converging forces, Lieutenant Colonel Raymond Murray boarded a helicopter late in the afternoon of 24

September and flew to Chesty Puller’s command post to coordinate the final assault. It was the first time the two commanders had ever met. Characteristically, Puller inquired of Murray the extent of the casualties he had sustained fighting for the northwest ridges. “He determined how good a fighter you were by how many casualties you had,” Murray recalled. Murray’s grim accounting of the 5th Marines’ losses during the preceding three days made even Chesty Puller blink. The men then got down to work.

This was the time and setting when Captain Robert Barrow’s Company A, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, seized Hill 79 and raised the first flag in Seoul proper. The 1st Marine Division had entered the capital.

The Fight for Seoul

Seoul in 1950 was home to more than a million people, the fifth largest city in the Orient. While

several hundred thousand civilian residents had fled the capital at the outbreak of the North Korean invasion, tens of thousands remained. Chesty Puller had ruefully predicted to a news correspondent that the North Koreans would defend the city in such a manner as to force the attacking Marines to destroy it. The ensuing three days would validate Puller’s prediction. British correspondent Reginald Thompson would write despairingly: “Few people can have suffered so terrible a liberation.”

X Corps launched its assault on Seoul proper the morning of 25 September. Lieutenant Colonel Erwin F. Wann, Jr.’s 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion displaced during the night to Sansa-ri, a former ferry crossing 5,000 yards east of Yongdungpo. There, reinforced by Army LVTs of Company A, 56th Amphibian Tractor Battalion, the Marines embarked the 2d Battalion, 32d Infantry. Following a brief artillery and mortar barrage, the Amtracs plunged into the Han, shook off a few 76mm rounds, and at 0630 disembarked the soldiers on the far bank. Four Corsairs from Lieutenant Colonel Lischeid’s VMF-214 Black Sheep squadron off the *Sicily* worked just ahead of the beachhead, coordinated by Marine tactical air control parties provided the 7th Division for the occasion.

The Army regiment completed the crossing by mid-afternoon and seized South Mountain, the 900-foot eminence (the Koreans call Nam-san) dominating southeastern Seoul. Late in the day, the 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion delivered the 17th ROK Infantry across in trace, an exposed crossing that attracted considerably more NKPA long-range fires. Yet by nightfall all of General Almond’s maneuver elements were in place north of the river.

General O. P. Smith worried that

the presence of the two additional regiments on his right flank would create dangerous crossfires and accidental meeting engagements, but the Army units maintained their positions on and around Nam-san, defending against major counterattacks, and later assaulted towards the east, well clear of the Marines' zone of action. No significant control problems developed.

At 0700 on the 25th, the 1st Marine Division kicked off its assault on Seoul. The plan of attack developed by Smith and his operations officer, Colonel Alpha L. Bowser, Jr., placed the biggest burden on the 1st Marines. Puller's regiment would attack to the north through the heart of the city on a mile-and-a-half front, bordered by Nam-san on the right and the Duk

Soo Palace of the ancient rulers of Korea, on the left. Smith assigned the 1st Marines Objective Able, the high ground just beyond the city's northeastern limit, about six miles from Captain Barrow's forward position on Hill 79. Murray's 5th Marines would attack the northwest section of the capital, likewise on a mile-and-a-half front, seize Government House and Objective Baker, the high ground overlooking the Seoul-Uijongbu road from their dearly won positions along the Hill 296 complex. Litzenberg's 7th Marines would seize Objective Charlie, the high ground along the Seoul-Kaesong road six miles outside the city center. Smith continued his reinforcement of the 1st and 5th Marines with one battalion each of Korean

Marines and assigned the balance of the Korean regiment as division reserve. Smith also attached the division Reconnaissance Company to the 5th Marines to screen the high ground along its left flank. The 3d Battalion, 187th Airborne, under the operational control of the 1st Marine Division, would protect the Marines' western flank below the Han.

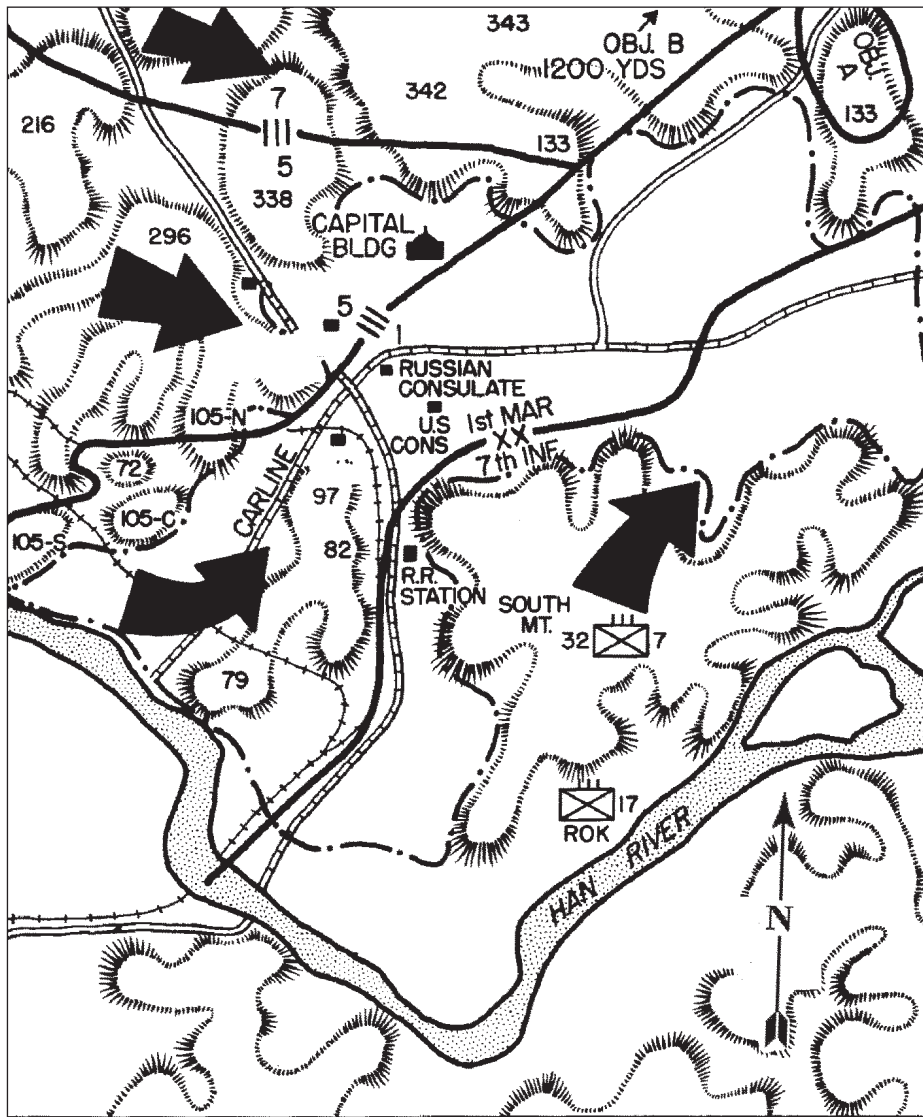
Colonel James H. Brower concentrated most of the howitzers of his 11th Marines in firing positions on the south bank of the Han near Yongdungpo. The big 155mm howitzers of the Army's 96th Field Artillery deployed nearby, ready to support either the Marines or the Army, as needed.

The action for the 5th Marines on 25 September was largely *deja*

The Marines fought two enemies in downtown Seoul—those who defended behind the barricades and the snipers seemingly hidden in every other window.

Photo by Frank Noel, Associated Press





SEOUL ASSAULT PLAN

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SHOWING DIVISION & REGTL BOUNDARIES



vu, the unfinished and still costly business of eliminating the residual positions of the 25th NKPA Brigade along the eastern fingers of Hill 296 as described earlier. Here on two adjoining knobs, Company E, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, and Companies H and I of 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, engaged the North Koreans in bloody close combat, again most

ably supported by Marine Corsairs.

By now the 19th NKPA Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment had learned how to deal with the terrifying strafing runs by Marine Corsairs. Increasingly, those anti-aircraft gunners who survived the northwest ridge battles would turn Seoul into a "flak trap." September 25th reflected this new lethality, a particularly costly day for Marine

Corsair squadron commanders. With the escort carrier *Sicily* and its embarked VMF-214 Black Sheep scheduled to rotate back to Inchon for repairs and resupply that afternoon, Lieutenant Colonel Walter Lischeid led the final sorties in support of the Army's river crossings. A North Korean gunner hit his Corsair over Seoul. Lischeid tried to nurse his crippled plane to Kimpo field but crashed in flames two miles shy of the airstrip.

In other aerial action on the 25th, Lieutenant Colonel Richard Wyczawski, commanding the Lancers of VMF-212, was wounded and shot down by hostile fire. So was Lieutenant Colonel Max Volcansek, commanding the night-fighting Tigers of VMF(N)-542, who barely bailed out before his plane crashed near Kimpo. Marines flying Sikorsky HO3S-1 helicopters from Marine Observation Squadron 6 (VMO-6) rescued both officers—Volcansek's rescue helicopter pulled him out of a rice paddy in a record six minutes elapsed time following notification—but all hands regretted the death of Lieutenant Colonel Lischeid.

Major Robert P. Keller, who had commanded three squadrons in the Pacific War, took over the Black Sheep. When a fellow aviator remarked, "Now you are the acting commanding officer," Keller retorted, "Acting, hell—I'm serious." Keller maintained the VMF-214 commitment to launching five-plane strikes every two hours. The Black Sheep pilots first plastered the ridge from which the anti-aircraft battery had fired on Lischeid, then spent the remainder of the day delivering ordnance against targets ranging from railroad yards in the North Korean capital of Pyongyang to enemy troop concentrations in downtown Seoul, the other capital.

The nature of Marine close air support changed as the campaign entered the streets of Seoul. As Lieutenant Colonel Norman Anderson subsequently noted: "Bombing by its very nature gave way to the more easily accurate techniques of rocketing and strafing. . . . I feel we became increasingly aware of the need to avoid what we now call collateral damage." The Corsair's 20mm cannon could deliver a hellacious strafing run, but the "bent-wing U-Birds" could only carry 800 rounds, limiting the extent of this application. Anderson wistfully recalled his days of flying Marine Corps B-25s in the Philippines late in World War II, "a memorable strafing with 14 forward-firing, .50-caliber machine guns. Many's the time we might have put them to good use supporting Marines in the streets of Yongdungpo and Seoul. Alas, they were not carrier suitable."

On the ground in Seoul on 25 September progress came grudgingly to the 1st Marines despite its

A Corsair flight on a close air support mission against targets in North Korea and around the South Korean capital.

early start. Puller passed Ridge's 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, through Sutter's 2d Battalion, while, to Ridge's right, Hawkins adjusted the 1st Battalion's positions along Hill 79 to accommodate the 90-degree pivot to the northeast. This done, the regiment advanced methodically, Ridge and Hawkins abreast, Sutter in close reserve. The North Koreans resisted savagely, and Puller looked often for his missing tanks, still completing their long run east from the Haengju ferry crossing the previous afternoon.

Fresh minefields and sudden ambushes slowed Captain Bruce F. Williams' tank company, reinforced by a platoon each of infantry and combat engineers, once they crossed the river. As the armored column approached Seoul they drew fire from the southeast corner of Hill 105-South, still unconquered despite Captain Fenton's seizure of the crest three days earlier. This time, finally, the Marines had a force on the ground with the firepower, mobility, and

shock action to finish the job. The tankers and engineers blew away a line of shacks blocking the base of the hill, thereby discovering the hidden cave mouth, and moved a flame tank up to the opening. Sensibly, the North Koreans began to surrender, one or two at first, then more than 100, outnumbering their captors.

The Marines to this point routinely made each prisoner of war strip buck naked, but they were shocked to find two women among this crew. Someone helpfully provided two pairs of long johns for the occasion, but the American press had a field day with the matter later, once the women got to the rear and complained. But it was a no-win situation for the Marines. The NKPA occupants of that cave had killed Marines from five different battalions; they were quite fortunate to escape the flame tank's horrors. As it was, other NKPA troops nearby had no intention of surrendering to the Marines. As Staff Sergeant Arthur Farrington reported:

The enemy wounded were hoisted on board the tanks, 129 bare asses were lined up three abreast [between the vehicles] . . . when about 40-50 [North] Koreans jumped up to the left of the railroad tracks. They had been lying their doggo behind us all the time. We killed them with rifle, machine gun, and 90mm fire as they went across the paddies.

Captain Williams was understandably exultant as he led his column with its rich prizes into Seoul, but when he tried to recount the unit's success at 105-South to Chesty Puller, the colonel cut him short, saying, "I'm not

Photo courtesy of LtCol Leo J. Ihli, USMC (Ret)





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A3380

Marine riflemen and tanks advance north under fire along Seoul's principal boulevard.

interested in your sea stories young man. You're late. We've got fish to fry."

Puller sorely needed the tanks. The North Koreans defending Seoul lacked the numbers to occupy every building or side street, so they concentrated instead on the major avenues and thoroughfares. By now each significant intersection in the city featured an improvised barricade, typically protected by rice bags filled with sand or rubble, piled eight feet high by five feet wide, and defended by anti-tank guns, heavy machine guns, and mines. Marine historian Colonel Robert D. Heinl, Jr., likened the scene to 19th century France: "Every intersection was barricaded after the fashion of the Paris Commune: carts, earth-filled rice bags . . . furniture, and rubble." The Soviet Union's official newspaper *Pravda* compared the situation in Seoul to the Russian defense of

Stalingrad in World War II: "There is firing behind every stone."

The axis of advance of Lieutenant Colonel Ridge's 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, was directly up Ma Po Boulevard towards the embassies and principal government buildings. Major Edwin Simmons later compared his company's advance to "attacking up Pennsylvania Avenue towards the Capitol in Washington, D.C." The boulevard was straight and wide—"once a busy, pleasant avenue lined with sycamores, groceries, wine and tea shops," according to Heinl. Trolley car tracks ran down the middle. Now NKPA barricades mushroomed at each intersection. Enemy snipers fired from blown out windows. Other NKPA troops lobbed Molotov cocktails from the rooftops onto the Marine tanks in the street below. And throughout all this mayhem fled thousands and thousands of terrified Korean

refugees. Mines accounted for appalling casualties among them.

At one point Captain Robert Barrow halted his company along a particularly advantageous rise of ground overlooking the railroad yards and passenger station. For once he could clearly see the enemy troops moving into new positions, building fresh barricades, and preparing future ambushes. He called in artillery and mortar fire, employed his machine guns and rocket launchers, enjoying his dominant position. Strangely, he said, Lieutenant Colonel Hawkins kept urging him to advance. "We thought we were having a turkey shoot," Barrow recalled. "Nobody getting hurt and [us] knocking the hell out of them," but Hawkins said, "What's holding you up—move out!" When Barrow tried to explain his favorable position, Hawkins replied bluntly: "Unless you want a new

Street Fighting, 1950

Marines battling their way through the contested boulevards and back alleys of Seoul in September 1950 did so without benefit of the modern-day doctrine and training for “military operations in urban terrain.” Street fighting at that time was an uncommon Marine experience. There had been a bloody two-day fight in downtown Vera Cruz, Mexico, in 1914, where Major Smedley D. Butler and Lieutenant Colonel Wendell C. “Whispering Buck” Neville led their men with axes and bayonets in attacking through the walls of the row-houses. Thirty years later, a different generation of Marines fought the Japanese through the burning streets of Garapan, Saipan, and again on a larger scale in the spring of 1945 amid the rubble of Naha, Okinawa.

But Seoul dwarfed Vera Cruz, Garapan, and Naha combined. An enormous, sprawling city dominated by steep hills, awash with terrified refugees, and stoutly defended by more than 20,000 North Koreans, Seoul constituted the largest, single objective ever assigned the

National Archives Photo (USA) 111-SC-351392



Marines. Hue City in 1968 would take the Marines longer to recapture, but the casualties incurred at Hue, bad as they were, would not total half those sustained by the 1st Marine Division at Seoul.

Street fighting in Seoul involved forcibly uprooting the NKPA troops from either their roadblock barricades or their isolated strongpoints within or atop the buildings. Both required teamwork: engineers, tanks, and infantry for the barricades (often supported by artillery or Corsair strikes), and rifle squads supported by rocket launchers and scout-sniper teams against the strongpoints.

Door-to-door fighting proved to be as tense and exhausting in 1950 as it had been in Vera Cruz in 1914. As Private First Class Morgan Brainard of the 1st Marines recalled the action: “The tension from these little forays whittled us pretty keen . . . I think if one’s own mother had suddenly leapt out in front of us she would have been cut down immediately, and we all would probably have cheered with the break in tension.” Brainard’s company commander, Captain Robert H. Barrow, told a Headquarters Marine Corps tactics review board in 1951 that he quickly came to value the 3.5-inch rocket launcher in applications other than antitank defense. “We employed it in a very effective manner in Yongdungpo and in Seoul in the destruction of houses that had enemy in them. In many instances [our] 3.5 [gunners] simply shot at some of these fragile houses killing all the occupants.”

The presence of so many civilian refugees in the streets and rubble vastly complicated the battle and necessitated extraordinary measures to ensure target identification and limit indiscriminate firing. Whenever troops stopped to reorganize “children appeared among them,” observed the *Life* magazine photographer David Douglas Duncan. “Children gentle and tiny and wide-eyed as they fastened themselves to the men who first ignored them . . . then dug them their own little foxholes and expertly adapted helmets to fit their baby heads.” Enemy snipers, mines, and long-range, heavy caliber antitank rifles took a toll among Marines and civilians alike. The ancient city became a ghastly killing ground.

battalion commander, you will attack at once.” Barrow managed to convince Hawkins to come and see the situation for himself. Hawkins marveled at the abundance of targets under direct observation: “Get more mortars in there—get more artillery.”

Yet Hawkins remained agitated,

and Barrow soon saddled up his gunners and forward observers and plunged forward downhill into the maze of streets and railroad tracks (3d Battalion, 1st Marines, had Ma Po Boulevard; 1st Battalion, 1st Marines’ axis of advance was less straightforward). Barrow and other junior officers in

the 1st Marines later concluded that the pressure to advance had come down several echelons, possibly from the Tokyo headquarters of General MacArthur in his desire to recapture the capital by the symbolic third-month anniversary of its loss. “Who knows?” Barrow asked rhetorically. “Puller was



Photo by Frank Noel, Associated Press

The North Koreans built their barricades with burlap bags filled with dirt, rubble, or rice. Each position took the Marines an average of 45 to 60 minutes to overcome. Here a Marine rifleman scampers through a recently abandoned barricade during heavy fighting in Seoul's downtown business district.

The front lines were jagged; the North Koreans occupied several worrisome salients in close proximity.

Ridge directed Major Edwin H. Simmons, commanding Weapons Company, to coordinate the battalion's forward defenses. Simmons fortified the roadblock with two rifle squads, a section of his Browning heavy machine guns, a rocket squad, and a 75mm recoilless rifle section borrowed from the regimental antitank company. After supervising his attached engineers as they laid a series of anti-tank mines on the bridge, Simmons established his observation post (OP) in the cellar of an abandoned house on a rise to the left rear of the roadblock, protected by four additional heavy machine guns. His 81mm mortar platoon occupied uncommonly close firing positions 150 yards rearward, connected by phone

being pushed by somebody in division. The division was being pushed by someone in Tenth Corps, and the corps was being pushed by the man himself, or someone speaking for him, back in Tokyo."

Top-level pressure notwithstanding, the two lead battalions of the 1st Marines could advance only 2,000 yards on the 25th. "Our advance this day was a foot-by-foot basis," said Lieutenant Colonel Ridge. North Korean mines knocked out two of Captain Williams' Pershing tanks; other vehicles sustained multiple hits from direct fire weapons. Ridge hunkered in for the night along Hill 97; Hawkins occupied Hill 82 to Ridge's immediate right rear. Company G and Weapons Company of 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, occupied the forward position, a roadblock protecting a key bridge on Ma Po Boulevard.

Under the watchful gaze of Joseph Stalin and Kim Il Sung, Marines crouch behind a barricade as enemy snipers resist their advance.

Photo courtesy of Leatherneck Magazine



wire to the OP. These were reasonable precautions given the volatile nature of the street fighting during the day and the nearby re-entrants occupied by the North Koreans. Parts of the city still burned from the day's fighting, but the streets seemed quiet.

Then, shortly after 2000, a flash message from X Corps arrived in the division command post. Aerial observers had just reported

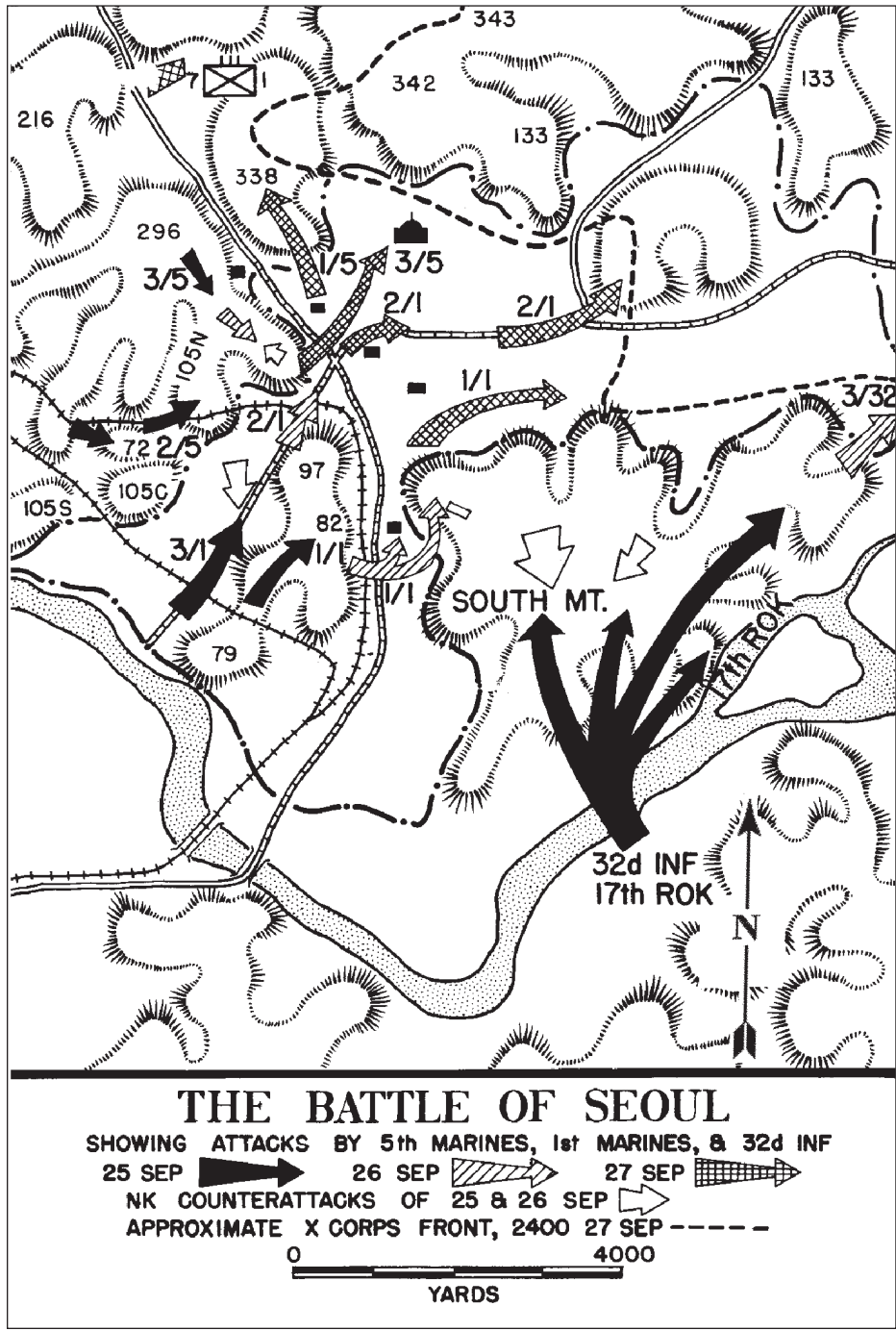
“enemy fleeing city of Seoul on road north of Uijongbu.” General Almond, sensing a great opportunity to crush the North Koreans, ordered an immediate advance by the 1st Marine Division, stating: “You will push attack now to the limit of your objectives in order to insure maximum destruction of enemy forces. Signed Almond.”

The flash message stunned Colonel Bowser. The order was

rife with unanswered questions—did Almond envision a five-mile night attack through the heart of the city by converging regiments out of direct contact with each other? And, by the way, how could an aerial observer distinguish at night between a column of retreating troops and a column of fleeing refugees? Bowser called his counterpart at X Corps with these questions but got nowhere. Neither did General Smith a moment later in a call to Almond's chief of staff. Smith shook his head and ordered his regimental commanders to comply—carefully. Throughout their smoking third of the city, the 1st Marine Division stirred and bitched. As one company commander queried: “A night attack without a reconnaissance or rehearsal? What are our objectives?” Private First Class Morgan Brainard recalled the grousing in the ranks that night: “We were all rousted out and mustered down on the darkened street by platoons. Scuttlebutt said we were going into the heart of Seoul in a surprise night attack.”

After allowing his regimental commanders plenty of time to coordinate their plans, General Smith ordered the advance to kick off at 0145 following a 15-minute artillery preparation. The enemy moved first. Before midnight a sizable NKPA force hit Lieutenant Colonel Taplett's 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, on Hill 105-North. Lieutenant Colonel Murray and his executive officer attempted to make sense of the situation: “I'm afraid we'll have to delay pursuit of the 'fleeing enemy' until we see if Tap can beat off the counterattack.”

As Major Simmons listened uneasily to the sounds of Taplett's firefight, less than 1,000 yards west, he received a call from Lieutenant Colonel Ridge ordering





Sketch by Col Charles H. Waterhouse, USMCR (Ret)

A Marine artillery forward observer team adjusts supporting fires on enemy barricades in downtown Seoul. The firing batteries were south of the Han River. Forward observer teams had to adjust their fire with utmost precision in the crowded city.

him to dispatch a patrol to link with a similar patrol from the 5th Marines to facilitate the forthcoming night attack. Simmons protested the order. From the volume of fire to the west, a considerable NKPA force had moved between the two regiments. "I doubted a patrol could get through," said Simmons. Ridge repeated the order. Simmons assembled a patrol of Company G riflemen, led by Corporal Charles E. Collins. They departed about 1245. "I felt like I was kissing them goodbye,"

Simmons admitted.

The onset of the artillery preparatory fires heightened Simmons' concern for his patrol. Colonel Puller worried that the fire was inadequate for a general assault. At 0138, he asked Smith for a second fire mission, delaying the jump-off time to 0200. Fifteen minutes later the whole issue became moot.

Major Simmons first heard sounds of a nearby firefight and realized Collins' patrol had been intercepted. A moment later, at

0153, he heard the unmistakable sounds of tracked vehicles approaching the roadblock from the north, along with an almost instantaneous *crack!* of a Soviet T-34 85mm tank gun. The shell missed Simmons by inches and killed his radio operator at his side. Shaken, Simmons sounded the alarm. Far from fleeing the city, the enemy—at least this particular battalion of the *25th NKPA Brigade*—was charging due south down Ma Po Boulevard with six to 12 tanks and self-propelled guns, accompanied by infantry. As his roadblock defenders cut loose on the enemy tanks, Simmons called for artillery and 81mm mortar concentrations along the bridge, and the battle raged. General Smith, sobered by the ferocity of the NKPA assaults, postponed the division's night attack indefinitely.

The Marines would soon call the northwestern nose of Hill 97 "Slaughterhouse Hill," and from its slopes this night they inflicted a killing zone of epic proportions against the attacking armored column. Three battalions of the 11th Marines fired incessantly the next 90 minutes. At that point the tubes became so hot the howitzers had to ceasefire until they could cool down. In the lull, the NKPA tanks surged forward again. Simmons unleashed his beloved heavy Browning machine guns. "In the light of the burning buildings," he said, "I could see three [tanks] clearly, rolling forward on [the] boulevard about 500 yards to my front." Simmons saw the tracers from the Brownings whanging off the faceplates of the tanks. He asked for 155mm howitzer fire from the Army. The 31st Field Artillery Battalion responded with awesome firepower—360 rounds along 3d Battalion, 1st Marines' direct front.

Chesty Puller did not recognize

the radio call sign of the Army artillery liaison officer coordinating the 155mm howitzer missions that night, but he knew first-class fire support when he saw it. "This is Blade," he growled into his handset, "I don't know who in the hell you are, but thank God! Out."

The Army fire mission destroyed or disabled the last of the NKPA tanks threatening the 3d Battalion's roadblock, but several immobilized vehicles maintained a stubborn fire. One self-propelled gun continued to fire at Simmons' observation post, each shell screeching overhead barely a degree in elevation too high. Simmons feared the coming dawn would make his position terribly exposed, so he moved one of the 75mm recoilless rifles from the roadblock to the rubble-strewn front yard of the abandoned house. The crew stared anxiously into the darkness just north of the bridge, hoping to get off the first shot at dawn. Finally, in the gray half-light, the gunner spotted the enemy vehicle and squeezed his trigger. The round was a pin-

wheel hit—the self-propelled gun burst into flames. But the Marines had forgotten to consider the back blast of the recoilless rifle. "It bounced off the mud-and-wattle side of the house behind us and knocked us head-over-heels," Simmons said, adding "we thought it very funny at the time."

Sunrise brought Simmons more welcome news. Corporal Collins, having ordered the rest of his patrol back to the roadblock at their first encounter with the approaching NKPA armored column, covered its retreat with rifle fire, and then took refuge for the night in a cellar. Somehow he found a set of white robes commonly worn by the Korean civilians. Thus attired, he made his way through the still-dangerous streets to the 3d Battalion, 1st Marines' lines and safety.

The North Koreans executed a third major spoiling attack at 0500, launching a reinforced battalion against the 32d Infantry's positions on Nam-san. The Army regiment stood its ground and did not get rattled when one company was

overrun. Making good use of his supporting arms, Colonel Charles Beauchamp organized a counterattack that drove the enemy out of the position and inflicted several hundred casualties.

At daybreak, Colonel Puller arrived at Lieutenant Colonel Ridge's position. "You had better show me some results of this alleged battle you had last night," he warned. Ridge was unperturbed. He showed Puller the wreckage of the NKPA vehicles north of the bridge, the ruins of seven tanks, two self-propelled guns, and eight 45mm antitank guns. At least 250 dead North Koreans lay in clots along the boulevard (the official figure of 475 may have included those slain by Lieutenant Colonel Taplett's 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, that same night), and there were more than 80 prisoners in hand. The Marines' side of the battlefield seemed covered with a river of spent brass shell casings. Major Simmons' 10 Browning heavy machine guns had fired a phenomenal 120 boxes of ammunition during the night—30,000 rounds, a feat that even surpassed the volume fired by the legendary Sergeant "Manila John" Basilone at Guadalcanal in 1942 in Puller's old battalion. Colonel Puller flashed a rare grin.

Time magazine's combat correspondent Dwight Martin described the battlefield the morning of the 26th, as Sutter's 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, passed through Ridge's 1st Battalion:

This morning Ma-Po wore a different look. The burned and blackened remains of the boulevard's shops and homes sent clouds of acrid smoke billowing over the city. Buildings still ablaze showered sparks and ashes high into the air to cascade down

Marine riflemen evacuate their wounded buddy under heavy enemy fire.

Department of Defense Photo (USA) SC351385





This page and the next, street fighting in Seoul as captured by Life magazine photographer David Douglas Duncan.





on red-eyed, soot-faced Marines.

Given these circumstances, it is not surprising that the Marines greeted with hoots of derision the communique by General Almond that Seoul had been liberated at 1400 the previous afternoon, the 25th of September. "Three months to the day after the North Koreans launched their surprise attack south of the 38th Parallel," the message proclaimed, "the combat troops of X Corps recaptured the capital city of Seoul." To their astonishment, the Marines learned that their corps commander considered the military defenses of Seoul to be broken. "The enemy is fleeing the city to the northeast," the communique concluded. An Associated Press correspondent reflected the infantry's skepticism: "If the city had been liberated, the remaining North Koreans did not know it."

In truth the Marines and soldiers would still be fighting for full possession of the capital 48 hours past General Almond's announced liberation date, but the issue was insignificant. The troops viewed the battle from purely a tactical perspective; their corps commander sensed the political ramifications. Of far greater significance at this point was the fact that five infantry regiments with a total lack of experience waging coalition warfare with combined arms in an enormous urban center were nevertheless prevailing against a well-armed, disciplined enemy. General MacArthur's visionary stroke at Inchon had succeeded in investing the city of Seoul in just 11 days. In view of the allies' disheartening performance in the Korean War to date, MacArthur, and Almond, had earned the right to boast.

Further, although the Marines

might not like to admit it, General Almond was essentially correct in his flash message the night of the 25th—the main body of the North Korean defenders, the remnants of a division, was indeed retreating north. What surprised all components of X Corps was the NKPA decision to expend the equivalent of an armored brigade in suicidal night attacks and die-hard defense of the main barricades to keep the Americans ensnared in the city.

Analyzing the NKPA decision to evacuate the main body of their defenders from Seoul is always risky, but there is evidence that the pullback resulted as much from their surprise at the unexpected crossing of the 32d Infantry and the 17th ROK Infantry from the southeast on the 25th—paired with the rapid advance of the 7th Marines, threatening the northern escape routes—as from the steady but predictable advance of the 5th and 1st Marines. Regardless, it was obvious to Almond and O. P. Smith that seizing such a mammoth objective as Seoul would require uncommon teamwork among Services, nations, and combat arms. Allied teamwork throughout the night attacks of 25-26 September had proven exemplary.

The Marines employed Corsairs and artillery to soften the barricades, then switched to 4.2-inch and 81mm mortars. The assault companies delivered machine gun and rocket fire on the fortifications to cover the deliberate minesweeping operations by combat engineers. Then came the M-26 Pershing tanks, often with other tanks modified as flamethrowers or bulldozers. On the heels of the tanks came the infantry with fixed bayonets. The process was unavoidably time-consuming—each barricade required 45-60 minutes to overrun—and each of these intermediate objectives took its toll

in Marine and civilian casualties. The city smoked and burned.

As Lieutenant Colonel Jack Hawkins' 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, fought its way clear of the railroad yards and entered a parallel thoroughfare his riflemen stared in horror at the rampant destruction. As it appeared to Private First Class Morgan Brainard, the scene was one of "great gaping skeletons of blackened buildings with their windows blown out...telephone wires hanging down loosely from their drunken, leaning poles; glass and bricks everywhere; literally a town shot to hell."

Not all the fighting took place around the barricaded intersections. There were plenty of other NKPA soldiers holed up in the buildings and rooftops. Many of these soldiers became the prey of Marine scout-sniper teams, some armed with old Springfield '03 bolt action rifles fitted with scopes, others favoring the much newer M1-C semi-automatic rifles, match-conditioned weapons graced with cheek pads, flash suppressors, leather slings, and 2.2x telescopic sights. The snipers often worked in teams of two. One man used binoculars or a spotting scope to find targets for the shooter.

Many of the buildings in the city center were multi-story, and, according to Private First Class Brainard, "it meant going up the stairs and kicking open the doors of each room, and searching the balconies and backyard gardens as well." Often the Marines had to fight their way through the buildings, smashing their way through the walls like Smedley Butler's Marines in Vera Cruz in 1914.

Colonel Puller led his regiment from very near the forward elements. On this day he dismounted from his jeep and stalked up Ma Po Boulevard shortly behind Lieutenant Colonel Sutter's 2d

Combat Engineers in the Seoul Campaign

Among the many unsung heroes who provided ongoing combat support to the infantry regiments of the 1st Marine Division in the recapture of Seoul were the dauntless practitioners of Lieutenant Colonel John H. Partridge's 1st Engineer Battalion. As did the division as a whole, the engineers represented an amalgam of World War II veterans, new recruits, and a spirited group of reservists, including members of the 3d Engineer Company, United States Marine Corps Reserve, from Phoenix, Arizona.

Fortunately, the Inchon landing caught the NKPA forces in the region off guard, and the battalion had time to shake itself down in non-urgent missions before breaking into small units to tackle enemy minefields. The engineers at first cleared beach exits and assembly areas in the Inchon area, then moved out to help reconnoiter the roads leading east to Seoul. Of immediate concern to Major General Oliver P. Smith and his operations officer, Colonel Alpha L. Bowser, Jr., was whether the numerous bridges along the highways and secondary roads were sturdy enough to support the Marines' new M-26 Pershing tank with its 46 tons of combat-loaded weight.

The Marines encountered the first serious NKPA minefields (both antitank and anti-personnel) in the vicinity of Kimpo Airfield. The subsequent arrival of highly-trained, first-line North Korean reinforcements in defensive positions guarding the approaches to Seoul led to minefields of increasing size and sophistication. Soviet Red Army advisors had trained the NKPA in mine warfare, and many of the mines encountered by the

Marines were made in Russia. These mines slowed the advance of the 1st Marine Division as it reached the outer defenses of Seoul along the Kalchon west of Yongdungpo or the avenues of approach to Hill 296 and its many subordinate peaks and ridgelines. Partridge's engineer teams performed their high-stress mine-clearing missions with progressive efficiency. This helped sustain the division's momentum and limited the time available to the enemy to more fully develop defensive positions within the city.

In Seoul, the Marines encountered barricaded roadblocks every 200 to 300 yards along the main boulevards. The North Koreans seeded most approaches with mines. The Marines formulated the necessary teamwork on the spot. The rifle company commander would shower the obstacle with fire, including smoke or white phosphorus mortar shells. Under this cover the engineer squad would hustle forward to clear the mines. Behind them would come the tanks, followed by the infantry. It was dangerous, often costly work. Sometimes a mine would detonate among the engineers. Sometimes they would miss a string and a tank would be lost. Most often, however, this painstaking process worked. Each barricade took an average of 45 minutes to clear. Utilizing this well-coordinated and increasingly proficient approach, the infantry battalions of the 1st Marines advanced an average of 1,200 yards each day—a small gain on a map, but an inexorable advance to the North Koreans.

The 1st Engineers provided another exceptional service to the division in the Seoul campaign—river cross-

Gen Oliver P. Smith Collection, Marine Corps Research Center



ing. The Han was a broad tidal river, and its few bridges had been blown up during the first week of the war. The Marines had amphibian tractors and DUKWs on hand to transport riflemen and small vehicles across against the current, but the campaign would never succeed without the means of ferrying, first, tanks and artillery, then heavy trucks and trailers. Major General Edward A. Almond, USA, commanding X Corps, had proven disingenuous in his repeated assurances that heavy bridging material would arrive in plenty of time to support the Marines' crossing in force. "General Almond promises bridge material," General O. P. Smith recorded in his journal. "This is an empty promise."

Thinking ahead, and acting on his own initiative, Lieutenant Colonel Partridge had obtained a pair of 50-ton pontoons in San Diego and had zealously protected them from the enraged embarkation officer who had to somehow load these unwelcome monsters on ships already stuffed with "essential" combat cargo. The pontoons proved priceless. Partridge had at least one sec-

tion on hand to support the crossing of the 5th Marines at Haengju on 20 September. Lieutenant Colonel Henry P. Crowe's 1st Shore Party Battalion quickly established a smooth functioning ferry service, doubling their productivity with the arrival of Partridge's second pontoon. Here the 7th Marines crossed, as well as the company of M-26 tanks needed so direly by Colonel Puller in his first full day of street fighting in Seoul. General Almond's bridging material arrived in time to support the crossing of General MacArthur's official party as they arrived in Seoul on 29 September.

Greater glories awaited the 1st Engineer Battalion in the forthcoming Chosin Reservoir campaign, where they cleared an expeditionary airfield at Hagaru-ri and assembled the air-dropped Treadway Bridge in Funchilin Pass below Koto-ri, but their yeoman performance in close support of the 1st Marine Division's assault on Seoul set a standard of combined arms operations and greatly facilitated the timely recapture of the capital.

Battalion, 1st Marines, as it clawed its way along each city block. Sergeant Orville Jones, Puller's hand-picked driver throughout 1950-55, followed his colonel in the jeep, a short distance to the rear. Sometimes the Marines fighting door-to-door along the street would be appalled to see Chesty Puller walking fully exposed and abreast of the action, Jones recalled. "'Holy Jeez,' they would yell to each other—'Don't let Chesty get ahead of us—move it!'"

Yet even the famously aggressive Chesty Puller could not expedite the methodical reduction of the barricades. Puller admitted, "progress was agonizingly slow." Said the engineer Captain Nicholas A. Canzona: "It was a dirty, frustrating fight every yard of the way."

Army Lieutenant Robert L. Strickland, a World War II veteran now assigned as a cameraman for X Corps, got caught up in the street fighting. He sought shelter in an open courtyard behind a burning building, but the enemy fire came from all directions. "We got so much fire of all kinds that I lost count," he said. "I have seen

a lot of men get hit both in this war and in World War II, but I think I have never seen so many get hit so fast in such a small area."

David Douglas Duncan, veteran Marine and extraordinary combat photographer for *Life* magazine, accompanied the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, during their advance through the rail yards towards the station. Describing the action in his subsequent photo book *This is War*, Duncan highlighted the timely arrival of Marine Pershing tanks that "growled up across the railroad tracks, into the plaza—and met the enemy fire head on." Then, Duncan continued: "The tanks traded round for round with the heavily-armed, barricaded enemy—and chunks of armor and bits of barricade were blown high into the air. They were killing themselves at point-blank range."

Private First Class Brainard of Company A, 1st Marines, described a barricade that had just been demolished by a pair of M-26 Pershing tanks:

We pass by the barricade which had been constructed

with large-sized rice bags . . . and also with odd bits of furniture, such as tables, chairs, and wooden doors, all piled up together. There were about ten dead gooks sprawled in and around the obstruction, and the blackened antitank gun was tipped over on its side with lots of unused shells scattered around it.

The 1st and 5th Marines were now converging close enough that Colonel Puller's men could clearly see Lieutenant Colonel Murray's troops still fighting to clear the final eastern finger of Hill 296, the ridge that extended into the heart of Seoul. Certain riflemen in 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, spoke admiringly of the 5th Marines being "once more on top of the highest hill in the local vicinity—born billy goats."

The 5th Marines may have appreciated the compliment, but by 26 September they were sick and tired of the steep northwest approaches and the stubbornly defending remnants of the *25th*



Photo by Frank Noel, Associated Press

While the Pershing tank "Dead Eye Dick" advances beyond a captured North Korean barricade, a Marine sniper team waits for the 45mm antitank rounds to abate before moving into new firing positions.

NKPA Brigade. Captain Robert A. McMullen's Company I, the men who had spearheaded Lieutenant Colonel Taplett's crossing of the Han back at Haengju and earned the praise of General Almond by their double envelopment of Hill 125, would again be in the spotlight on the 26th. Taplett assigned McMullen the mission of sweeping the eastern terminus of the huge lower spur of Hill 296 that extended very near the major intersection of the Kaesong-Seoul highway and Ma Po Boulevard. Ahead, less than a mile to the northeast lay Government House. And not far beyond the palace was the boundary between the 1st and 7th Marines. By design, Murray's regiment, which had sustained the highest casualties the preceding week, was close to being pinched out and assigned a reserve role.

A brief helping hand from a Marine amid a day of great terror for the civilians—high explosives, burning buildings,

downed power lines, and scattered families.

Photo by David Douglas Duncan



Private First Class Eugene A. Obregon

Born in November 1930, Private First Class Obregon enlisted in the Marine Corps in June 1948. Assigned to the 5th Marines, he was part of the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade, which was rushed to Korea in August 1950. He participated in the bloody battles at the Naktong River—crucial victories, which helped save the Pusan Perimeter from collapse.

When the 5th Marines re-embarked to join the 1st Marine Division for the assault landing at Inchon on 15 September, Obregon again took part. On 26 September, during the battle to recapture the South Korean capital, his heroic actions were recognized by a posthumous award of the Medal of Honor. The official citation reads, in part:

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving with Company G, Third Battalion, Fifth Marines, First Marine Division (Reinforced), in action against enemy aggressor forces at Seoul, Korea, on 26 September 1950. While serving as an ammunition carrier of a machine-gun squad in a Marine rifle company which was temporarily pinned down by hostile fire, Private First Class Obregon observed a fellow Marine fall wounded in the line of fire. Armed only with a pistol, he unhesitatingly dashed from his covered position to the side of the casualty. Firing his pistol with one hand as he ran, he grasped his comrade by the arm with his other hand and, despite the great peril to himself, dragged him to the side of the road.

Still under enemy fire, he was bandaging the man's wounds when hostile troops of approximately platoon strength began advancing toward his position. Quickly seizing the wounded Marine's carbine, he placed his own body as a shield in front of him and lay there firing accurately and effectively into the hostile group until he himself was fatally wounded



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A43987-B

by enemy machine-gun-fire. Private First Class Obregon enabled his fellow Marines to rescue the wounded man and aided essentially in repelling the attack.

The fellow Marine, whose life Obregon had saved, was Private First Class Bert M. Johnson. He recovered from his wounds and was returned to active duty. Obregon's sacrifice was memorialized when a building at Camp Pendleton, a ship, and a high school in the Los Angeles area were named after him.

—Captain John C. Chapin, USMCR (Ret)

But Hill 296 and Colonel Wol's hard-core survivors were not through with the 5th Marines. Company I's stouthearted advance encountered fierce opposition from the start. At one point McMullen led his troops into a maze of trenches manned by 200 North Koreans and forced them out by the sheer velocity of the assault—only to lose the position to a vicious counterattack. The two forces struggled across this

contested ground the balance of the afternoon. At day's end the Marines held the field but were too depleted to exploit their advantage. Captain McMullen fell wounded and was evacuated. He had qualified for his seventh Purple Heart in two wars. Two Marines in Company G, 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, fighting in somewhat lower ground adjacent to Company I's battlefield, each received their fifth wound since

the regiment's arrival in Pusan 53 days earlier.

Elsewhere during Company G's day-long fight, Corporal Bert Johnson, a machine-gunner, and Private First Class Eugene A. Obregon, his ammunition humper, tried to set up their weapon in an advanced position. The North Koreans charged, wounding Johnson with submachine gun fire. Obregon emptied his pistol at the shadows closing in, then dragged



Photo by David Douglas Duncan

Frightened civilians scurry to shelter while three Marine Corps Pershing tanks duel with North Korean antitank guns at a barricaded intersection along Ma Po Boulevard.

Johnson to a defilade position to dress his wounds. When the enemy swarmed too close, Obregon picked up a carbine and emptied the clip, always shielding Johnson with his body. There were too many of them, and in the end the North Koreans shot him to pieces. But Obregon had delayed their attack long enough for other Marines to hustle down the slope and rescue Johnson. Private First Class Obregon's family would receive his posthumous Medal of Honor.

The two rifle companies had fought their damndest, but the 5th Marines still could not fight their way clear of the highlands. Stymied, Lieutenant Colonel Raymond Murray marshaled his forces for the final breakthrough on the morrow.

Nor was Murray in a position to maximize his supporting arms, as he had been able to do in the earlier assault on Smith's Ridge. He noted with some envy the volume of heavy-caliber indirect fire and the frequent Corsair missions being

delivered in support of Puller's advance to his right front. "Chesty used a lot of artillery," Murray said later. "And you could almost see a boundary line between the two of [us], the smoke coming up from his sector and very little smoke coming up from mine." Lieutenant Colonel Jon Hoffman, author of Puller's definitive biography, noted the irony that Puller had been criticized six years earlier at Peleliu for abjuring supporting arms while his infantry elements shattered themselves in direct assaults against Bloody Nose Ridge. By comparison, Colonel Harold D. "Bucky" Harris, commander of the 5th Marines at Peleliu, had received praise for his policy of being "lavish with ordnance and stingy with the lives of my men." Now, in the streets of Seoul, it was Puller's turn to be "lavish with ordnance."

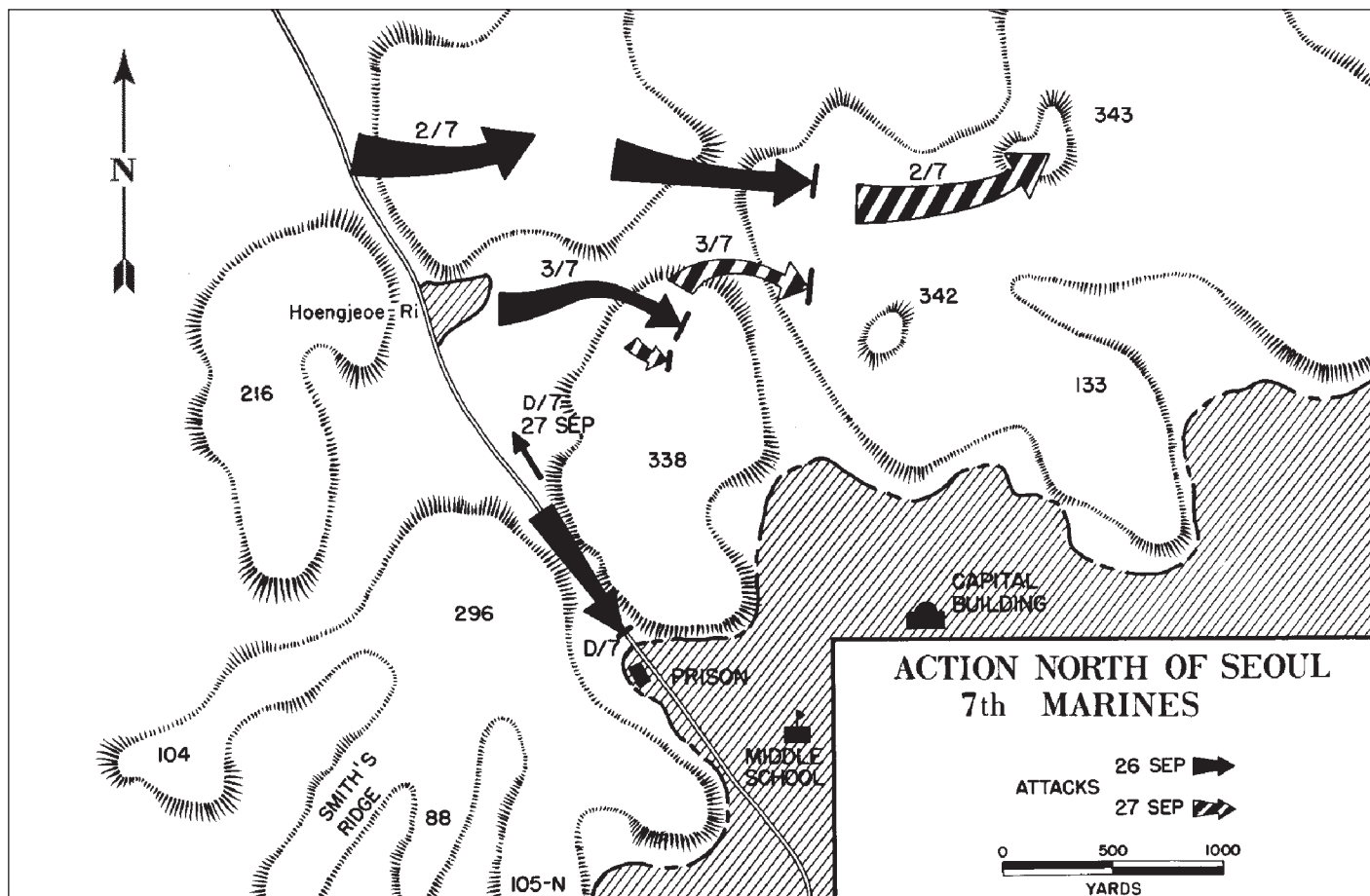
Another bitter lesson learned by the 1st Marine Division at Peleliu was how to protect its tanks from suicide sapper attacks. The "Old Breed" was the only division in the subsequent battle of Okinawa not

to lose a tank to Japanese sappers. In downtown Seoul on 26 September, however, this distinctive streak ended. A nimble-footed North Korean darted out from the rubble, caught 2d Battalion, 1st Marines' riflemen by surprise, and flung a satchel charge atop a passing flame tank, then vanished in the blast and smoke. The crew escaped unscathed, but the tank was destroyed. Angered and embarrassed by this bad luck, 2d Battalion's NCOs forcibly reminded their men to watch the adjacent alleys and rubble piles, not the tanks. This paid off. The NKPA launched a dozen more sapper attacks against Marine tanks operating in the center of the boulevard; Lieutenant Colonel Sutter's troops cut each one of them down.

There was no real "school solution" that applied to the kaleidoscopic action taking place on the streets of Seoul on the 26th of September. Captain Norman R. Stanford, commanding Company E, 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, had as much tactical experience as anyone on the scene, having served as a company commander in the 1st Marines throughout Peleliu and Okinawa. Sutter ordered Stanford to follow Company F up the boulevard in trace, then take the right fork while Company F took the left at a designated intersection ahead. Sutter's closing guidance was succinct: "Move out fast and keep going." But Company F encountered a particularly nasty barricade just past the intersection and could not advance up the left fork.

Captain Stanford went forward to assess the delay. From 200 yards away the NKPA barricade looked unassailable:

I took one look at the AT [antitank] muzzle blasts kicking aside the pall of smoke over the roadblock, and I



glanced at the thin flicker of automatic fire running across the barricade like a single line of flame and dived off the sidewalk into an alley.

Stanford's radio failed at this critical juncture. He had the option of bypassing Company F and the barricade and carrying out his assigned mission along the right fork, notwithstanding his naked left flank, or bowling straight ahead through Company F, smashing the barricade, and attacking with Company E up the left fork. He had the firepower—four tanks, an engineer platoon, rocket squads, and a 75mm recoilless rifle section attached. "I knew that we could go through anything for 250 yards," he said, risking the second option. He hurled his forces forward, towards the barricade. "We had it hot and heavy

among the burning buildings and the crumbled sandbags of the barricade, and then they broke and ran . . . and we butchered them among the Russian AT [antitank] guns and the Japanese Nambu machine guns." Company E lost two officers and 18 men in their headlong assault. Captain Stanford was one of the wounded.

Sutter's battalion, like Taplett's along the ridge just to the west, had fought their best, but "the fleeing enemy" had limited his advance to 1,200 yards. Seoul would not fall this day.

Further to the northwest, and now not very far away, the 7th Marines veered towards the capital in keeping with O. P. Smith's orders to pinch out the 5th Marines. Company D, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, led the advance along the Kaesong Highway as it threaded through

two towering hills, the now-infamous Hill 296 on the right and Hill 338 on the left. First Lieutenant William F. Goggin, the machine gun officer, led the advance party.

Compared to all the grief being experienced by the other two regiments on the 26th, the 7th Marines enjoyed what at first appeared to be a cakewalk. Thousands of grateful civilians thronged the right-of-ways and hillsides, cheering the approaching Marines. It was an uncommon experience for Marines of any war to date, a welcome grace note to serve as a partial offset for the horrors to come. The North Koreans, of course, took prompt advantage of this opportunity.

The dense crowds prevented Company D from maintaining its own outriding flank protection along the ridges on both sides of the road and caused the van to

overshoot the intended linkup point with the 5th Marines. The company unwittingly entered the city and the final defenses of one of the sacrificial battalions left behind by the departed *25th NKPA Brigade*.

Sudden machine gun fire from the front felled First Lieutenant William F. Goggin, halted the column, and created panic among the well wishers. Then other machine guns opened up at close range along the high ground on both sides. Another enemy force scrambled downhill to establish a blocking position in the rear. Company D was abruptly encircled and cut off.

Captain Richard R. Breen,

though wounded early in the fighting, maintained his presence of mind. He still commanded a large, fresh, well-armed company. Once the civilians vanished and his Marines went to ground in good firing positions, he figured his men could hold their own, despite the danger. When Colonel Litzenberg called to see what kind of help he needed, Breen answered calmly, "We're okay, Colonel."

Had Company D's entrapment occurred two days earlier the ensuing darkness might have proven catastrophic, but by now the NKPA forces lacked the punch to finish the job. Additionally, Captain Breen received some spectacular help. Two U.S. Air Force C-47s

dropped ammunition, rations, and medicine to the surrounded Marines just before dusk (one plane, badly shot up by North Korean anti-aircraft gunners, had to crash-land at Kimpo). During the night Lieutenant (junior grade) Edward Burns, USN, the regimental surgeon, led a high-balling convoy of jeep ambulances through the enemy perimeter to retrieve 40 of Company D's most seriously wounded men.

Lieutenant Colonel Parry's 3d Battalion, 11th Marines, still in direct support of the 7th Marines, was the first artillery unit to cross the Han. At that point the infantry regiment extended from the north bank of the Haengju ferry crossing

By the third full day of the battle for Seoul, the city lay in ruins. Shell holes buckled the streets, rubble lay strewn everywhere, and a thousand fires blazed furiously. Exhausted Marines regroup for the final barricade assault.

Photo by Frank Noel, Associated Press



to the edge of Seoul, “a sector of 18 miles,” said Parry, which required him to deploy “three batteries on three separate azimuths.” Company D’s encirclement on the edge of Seoul on the 26th caused a predicament. The company had crossed into the 5th Marines zone, and “it was several hours before we were able to obtain clearance to shoot.” But Parry’s gunners made up for the delays with pinpoint defensive fires around the Company D perimeter throughout the night. “We were credited by the company commander with saving their bacon,” Parry said. The anticipated NKPA night attack did not materialize.

By now all of Colonel Homer L. Litzenberg’s 7th Marines had received their separate baptisms of fire. One member of Company B, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, recalled his own first combat encounter:

The company was above

Marines of Company G, 5th Marines, jubilantly yank down the Communist flag at Government House and run up the American and United Nations flags.

Seoul when we ran into a fire-fight. We were moving at night. [There were] green tracers coming in, red tracers going out. It was confusing . . . I was scared [and] pretty much hugged the ground. I didn’t even know how to dig a fox-hole, but the Gunnery Sergeant told me how: “Make it like a grave.”

The 26th of September, though devoid of major tactical gains in the fight for Seoul, ended with a significant operational breakthrough. At Suwon, 27 miles south of Seoul, three U.S. Army tanks of the 7th Cavalry raced into the perimeter of the 7th Division shortly before midnight. The Eighth Army had fought its way clear of the Pusan Perimeter, and its leading elements had linked up with X Corps.

For the 1st Marine Division, the climax of the Inchon-Seoul cam-

paign came on 27 September, and most of O. P. Smith’s disheveled troops seemed to sense the opportunity as soon as the new day dawned. Sunrise brought a special relief to Company D, 7th Marines, after its all-night vigil in the steep pass at the city limits. Litzenberg’s relief column of tanks, infantry, and engineers fought their way into the position against negligible opposition. Captain Breen received his second wound during the extraction of his company, but the volume of enemy fire had diminished sharply from the previous day. While no one enjoyed being cut off, surrounded, and pinned down for 18 hours, Company D had acquitted itself well and learned lessons that would prove valuable in the hill fights ahead.

On this day, the 5th Marines finally fought their way clear of Hill 296 and into the city streets. By 0930, Taplett’s 3d Battalion had linked up with Sutter’s 2d Battalion, 1st Marines. Taplett wheeled northeast, grimly aiming for the huge red banners still flying over Government House and Chang Dok Palace.

As the lead battalions of both regiments lengthened their strides, a sense of friendly rivalry spurred them into a race to raise the national colors over key landmarks. The 1st Marines fought their way into several embassies, led by Company E, pausing to raise the flag over first the French, then the Soviet (with great irony), and finally the United States residences. Growled one gunnery sergeant: “It looks like the 4th of July around here.”

Lieutenant Colonel Taplett’s 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, had a brief but fierce fight on its final approach to the palace. Die-hard North Koreans, bolstered by a pair of self-propelled guns, fought to



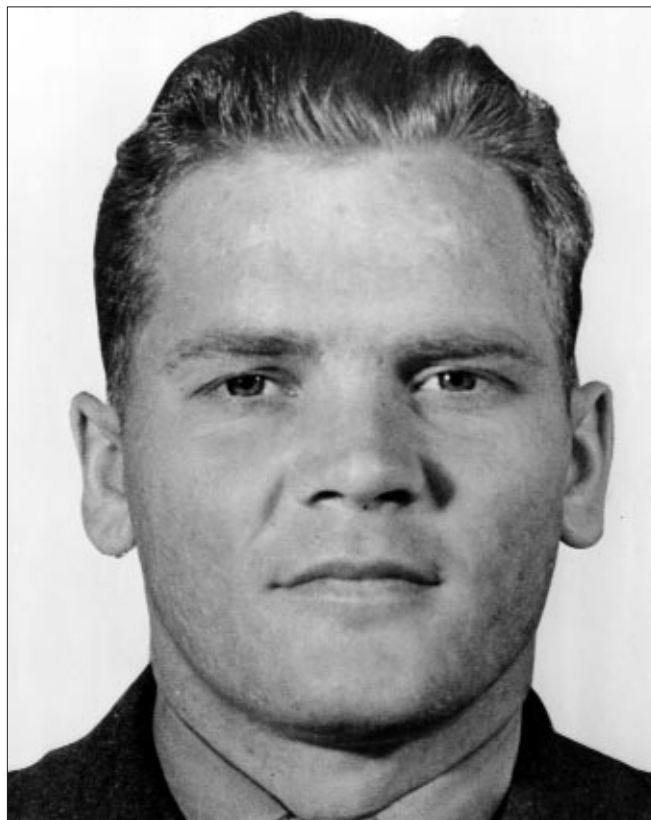
Photo courtesy of *Leatherneck Magazine*

Private First Class Stanley R. Christianson

Private First Class Christianson was born in January 1925 in Mindore, Wisconsin. After he enlisted in the Marine Corps in October 1942, he served with the 2d Division in three World War II campaigns. For his services, he was awarded a Letter of Commendation. Following duty during the occupation of Japan, he had a variety of assignments, including drill instructor at Parris Island.

When the Korean War broke out, he was a member of Company E, 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, and took part in the Inchon assault. For his actions at Inchon, he received a Bronze Star Medal. During the subsequent battle for Seoul, he gave his life on 29 September, at the age of 25, on Hill 132. Private First Class Christianson's citation for the Medal of Honor awarded him reads, in part:

Manning one of the several listening posts covering approaches to the platoon area when the enemy commenced the attack, Private First Class Christianson quickly sent another Marine to alert the rest of the platoon. Without orders, he remained in his position and, with full knowledge that he would have slight chance of escape, fired relentlessly at oncoming hostile troops attacking furiously with rifles, automatic weapons and incendiary grenades. Accounting for seven enemy dead in the immediate vicinity before his position was overrun and he himself fatally struck down, Private First Class Christianson was responsible for allowing the rest of the platoon time to man positions, build up a stronger defense on that flank and repel the attack



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A-43986

with 41 of the enemy destroyed, and many more wounded and three taken prisoner.

After the war, his sacrifice was recognized by the dedication of a statue in his honor at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. —Captain John C. Chapin, USMCR (Ret)

the end. Taplett's tank-infantry teams carried the day. Colonel Robert D. Heinl preserved the dramatic climax: "Moving at the high port up Kwangwhamun Boulevard, Company G, 5th Marines burst into the Court of the Lions at Government House, ripped down the red flag, and Gunnery Sergeant Harold Beaver ran up those same colors his forebears had hoisted 103 years earlier atop the Palace of the Montezumas." Two Korean Marines raised their national colors at the National Palace.

The fight for Seoul continued, especially along the towering

ridgelines to the north, but by dusk in the city the NKPA had ceased to offer organized resistance. Twelve days after the surprise landing at Inchon (and two days after General Almond's victory communique), X Corps had seized sole possession of the capital city of the Republic of South Korea.

The 7th Marines continued to advance through the high ground north of the city, cutting the highway from Seoul to Uijongbu on the 28th. In this fighting Lieutenant Colonel Thornton M. Hinkle, commanding 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, was wounded and evacuated. Major Webb D. Sawyer took com-

mand. Meanwhile, the 31st Infantry and 17th ROK Infantry attacked to the east, successfully sealing off the last NKPA escape routes. There were still small bands of North Korean troops loose within the city—two of these struck the 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, in predawn counterattacks as late as the 29th. The first occurred at 0445, when an observation post on Hill 132 was infiltrated by an estimated 70 to 100 North Korean troops. A second attack hit the left flank of the battalion a short time later. Both attacks were repulsed with a loss of 28 Marines wounded and four

killed, among them Private First Class Stanley R. Christianson, who subsequently received the Medal of Honor for his actions. Despite these counterattacks, the war was moving north, well above Seoul. Indeed, South Korean troops were about to cross the 38th Parallel.

On 29 September, General MacArthur and South Korean President Syngman Rhee and their wives returned to Seoul for a triumphant ceremony, accompanied by a large official retinue. The concentration of so many VIPs within the smoldering city so soon after the heavy fighting made General O. P. Smith nervous. Isolated NKPA antiaircraft gunners still exacted a price against allied planes flying over the city's northern suburbs, especially the slow flying observation aircraft of VMO-6, which lost a single-engine OY and an HO3S-1 helicopter on the day of the ceremony. Smith positioned Lieutenant Colonel Taplett's 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, on the hill overlooking the palace and Lieutenant Colonel Ridge's 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, along the route to be taken by the dignitaries—out of sight, but loaded for bear.

Despite the cost of more than 700 Marine casualties in seizing most of Seoul during the climactic three days of 25-28 September, only a handful of Marines attended the commemorative ceremony. Generals Smith and Craig, Colonel Puller, and Lieutenant Colonel Murray were there (Puller barely so; when a Military Police officer barred his jeep from the sedan entrance he ordered Sergeant Jones to drive over the officious major), but Colonels Litzenberg and Brower were still fighting the war north of the city and the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing senior officers were gainfully employed elsewhere. In retrospect it is unfortu-



Photo by Frank Noel, Associated Press

South Korean civilians curiously observe one of their exhausted Marine liberators.

nate that more of those who had battled so hard for the victory—Marines, Navy corpsmen, soldiers, ROK troops, men of all ranks and specialties, grunts and aviators alike—could not have shared this special occasion. For a moment on the afternoon of the 27th, Seoul had seemed their dearly-won city. Two days later they were being told to remain out of sight of the official celebrants.

MacArthur conducted the special ceremony at high noon in the National Palace, ignoring the tinkle of broken glass that fell from the ceiling dome windows with every concussive rumble of distant artillery. “Mr. President,” he intoned in his marvelous baritone voice, “By the grace of a merciful Providence our forces fighting under the standard of that greatest hope and inspiration of mankind, the United Nations, have liberated this ancient capital city of Korea . . . I am happy to restore to you, Mr. President, the seat of your govern-

ment that from it you may better fulfill your constitutional responsibilities.” With tears running down his cheeks, MacArthur led the dignitaries in the Lord’s Prayer. President Rhee was nearly overcome with emotion. To MacArthur he said: “We love you as the savior of our race.”

The ceremony at the national capital represented Douglas MacArthur at his legendary finest. In the best of all worlds the Korean War would have ended on this felicitous note. In reality, however, the blazing speed with which MacArthur had reversed the seeming disaster in South Korea contained the seeds of a greater disaster to come in the north. The United States and the United Nations, flush with September’s great victories, were fatally modifying their war aims to include the complete subjugation of North Korea and the forcible reunification of the entire peninsula. Already there were plans afoot to

deploy the Marines north of the 38th Parallel. General Almond took O. P. Smith aside as they were leaving the ceremony and issued a warning order. The 1st Marine Division would soon be making another "end-run" amphibious landing on the northeast coast.

Other threats materialized. On the day following the Seoul ceremony, Chinese Premier Chou En-Lai warned the world that his nation "will not supinely tolerate" the invasion of North Korea. Few

people in the West took him seriously.

In the meantime, Almond ordered Smith to seize and defend a series of blocking positions north of Seoul. The 5th Marines attacked northwest. The 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, executed an aggressive reconnaissance in force as far as the town of Suyuhyon against what the division special action report described as "moderate enemy resistance."

The 7th Marines drew the short-

est straw, the division objective of Uijongbu, a vital road junction in the mountains 16 miles due north of Seoul. Here the highway and railroad tracks veer northeast towards the port of Wonsan and beyond, an important escape route for NKPA forces fleeing the "hammer and anvil" of the now converging Eighth Army with X Corps.

Smith reinforced the 7th Marines by attaching Major Parry's 3d Battalion, 11th Marines (reinforced with a battery of 155mm howitzers from 4th Battalion, 11th Marines), plus one company each of Pershing tanks, combat engineers, and Korean Marines, and an Army antiaircraft battery. This constituted a sizable force, virtually a small brigade, but Colonel Litzenberg would need every man in his three-and-a-half day battle for the road junction. Intelligence reports available to Litzenberg indicated he would be opposed by an amalgamation of NKPA units, including the remnants of the *Seoul City Regiment*, the *2d Regiment*, *17th Rifle Division*, withdrawn from the Pusan Perimeter after the Inchon landing; and the fresh *75th Independent Regiment*, which reached Uijongbu from Hamhung the day before the 7th Marines attacked.

Principal air support for Litzenberg's advance would come from the Corsair pilots of Lieutenant Colonel Frank J. Cole's VMF-312, the Checkerboard squadron, newly arrived at Kimpo from Itami, Japan. Cole had commanded the same squadron as a major at the end of World War II and had trained his new aviators exceptionally well.

On 1 October, Colonel Litzenberg led his well-armed force northward. Advance aerial and map reconnaissance led him to conclude that the NKPA would most likely make a stand at

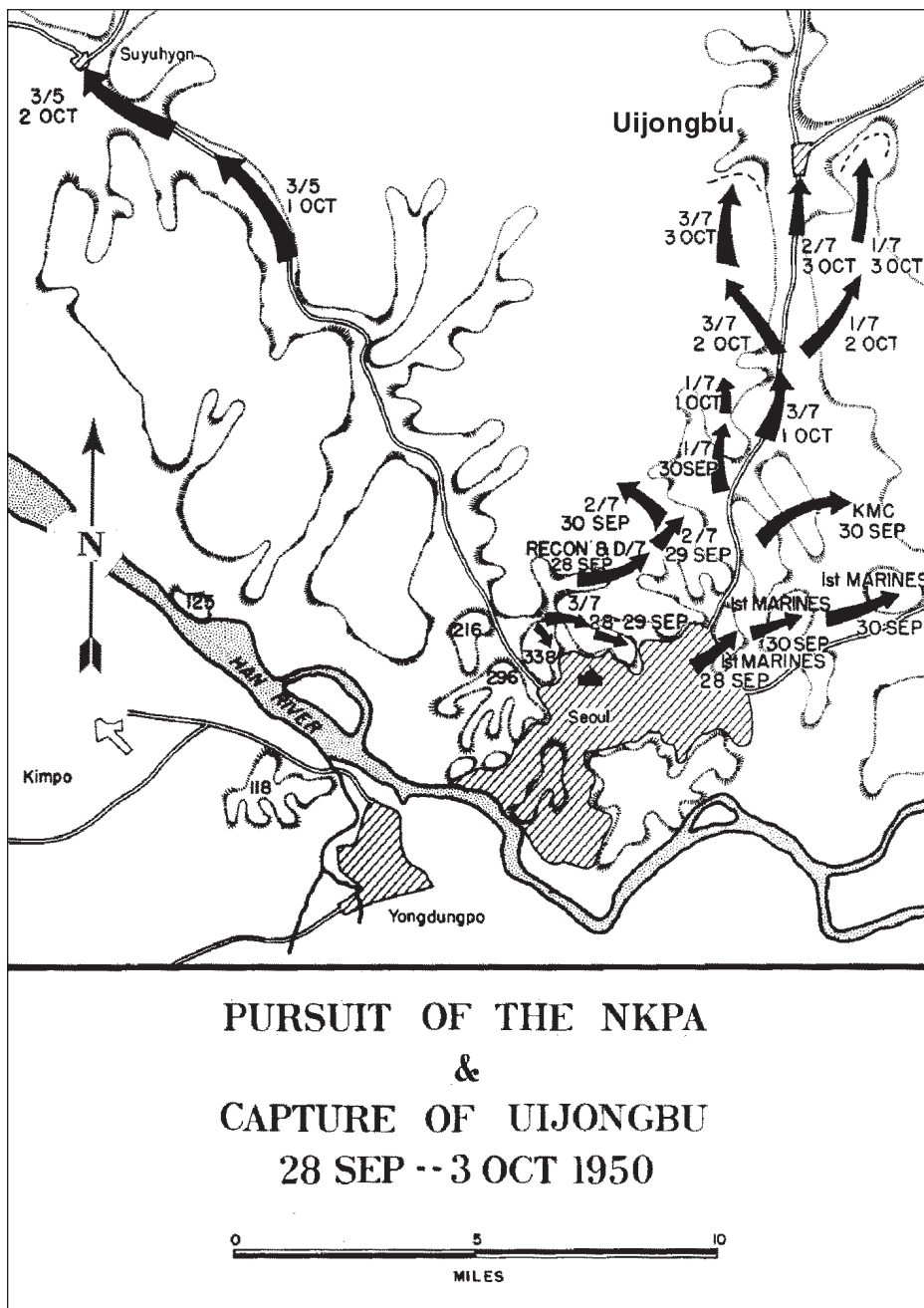




Photo by Frank Noel, Associated Press

A Marine mortar section moves north of Seoul past a grateful band of South Koreans.

Nuwon-ni where the highway passed through a narrow defile—a veritable “Apache Pass.” Litzenberg planned for Lieutenant Colonel Raymond G. Davis’ 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, to execute a tactical feint along the high ground on both sides, while Major Maurice E. Roach’s tank-heavy 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, barreled straight through the pass during the distraction. The plan ran awry when Roach encountered a thick minefield in the pass. Litzenberg shifted both battalions to the high ground, and the Checkerboards of VMF-312 appeared at dawn on the 2d with a vengeance, bombing, strafing, and dropping napalm canisters. Davis and Roach scratched

forward slowly along both ridges; the engineers labored in the minefields. But the North Koreans contested every yard, shooting down three Corsairs, disrupting the engineers, and limiting the Marines to less than a quarter-mile gain that day. During this fighting, Second Lieutenant Joseph R. Owen, the mortar officer in Company B, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, learned bitter lessons in tactical communications. “The North Koreans,” he said, “used whistles and bugles for battlefield command, more effective by far than our walkie-talkies.” In addition, Lieutenant Lloyd J. Englehardt of VMO-6 flew his glassy-nosed HO3S-1 helicopter through heavy fire to rescue

downed Checkerboard pilot Captain Wilbur D. Wilcox near the village of Chun-chon.

On 3 October, the regiment unveiled a good-luck piece, General Clifton B. Cates, Commandant of the Marine Corps, nicknamed “Lucky” Cates for his survival amid the First World War’s bloodiest battlefields. Cates had flown to Korea to observe his Marines in action. Litzenberg’s force put on a stellar show. The engineers having at considerable cost cleared the minefield in the defile, Major Webb D. Sawyer’s 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, pounded straight up the middle. Soon they began overrunning enemy field pieces and had the enemy on the

run. The NKPA had staked everything on holding the pass at Nuwon-ni and had little left to defend Uijongbu. Litzenberg unleashed all his forces. Sawyer's men stormed through the ruined town by late afternoon, the major pausing to telephone Litzenberg—widely known by his nickname “Litz the Blitz”—saying, “This is the Mayor of Blitz!”

The Uijongbu drive cost the 7th Marines 13 killed and 111 wounded, but the combat experience was worth the price to the newly formed regiment. Observed Lieutenant Joseph Owen: “For Baker-One-Seven it was combat training under fire; in those five

days we became a good Marine rifle company.”

The battle for the Nuwon-ni Pass marked the end of significant fighting in the Inchon-Seoul campaign. Almost immediately the 1st Marine Division turned over its assigned sector to the 1st Cavalry Division of the Eighth Army and began returning by regiments to the vicinity of Inchon for re-embarkation.

The leading elements of the division and other X Corps components assembled at a United Nations cemetery near Inchon on 6 October to honor their dead. Division Chaplain Robert M. Schwyhart led the spiritual salute.

From left, BGen Edward A. Craig; the Commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen Clifton B. Cates; and MajGen Oliver P. Smith, inspect the North Korean flag that recently was hauled down by Marines at Government House in Seoul.

Photo courtesy of Leatherneck Magazine



Major General Oliver P. Smith laid a wreath on the grave of Corporal Richard C. Matheny, a stalwart squadleader of the 5th Marines who before his death qualified in swift succession for the Bronze Star, Silver Star, and Navy Cross.

The combined Inchon-Seoul campaign cost the 1st Marine Division 2,450 casualties, according to the official history (415 killed or died of wounds; 2,029 wounded in action; 6 missing in action). North Korean gunners shot down 11 fighters of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing. For their part, the Marines destroyed or captured 47 Russian-built tanks and sufficient heavy mortars, field guns, antitank guns, machine guns, and rifles to equip a good-sized brigade. A preponderance of the 14,000 NKPA fatalities claimed by X Corps in the campaign resulted from the combined air-ground fire of the Marines.

Such statistics had more relevance in World War II than in the murky political and psychological nature of limited warfare in the Atomic Age. The Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union and their respective allies and surrogates was fully underway by 1950. In Seoul in September of that year, the United Nations for the first time restored the freedom of a democratic capital captured by Communist force of arms. The fact that all of X Corps' hard-fought gains would be swept away by the Chinese Communist counter-offensive three months later added to the bitter-sweet irony of this protracted war. In the final accounting, the 1953 ceasefire left Seoul firmly established as the capital of the Republic. Seoul's flourishing growth and development over the ensuing half century remain a tribute to the sacrifices of all those who fought and died to recapture

1st Marine Division Daily Casualties, Seoul Campaign

Date	Killed in Action	Died of Wounds	Missing in Action	Wounded in Action	Total Battle Casualties
20 Sep	24	1	3	119	147
21 Sep	30	3	0	198	231
22 Sep	27	3	0	135	165
23 Sep	19	7	0	117	143
24 Sep	68	4	0	217	289
25 Sep	33	4	1	238	276
26 Sep	29	7	0	167	203
27 Sep	33	3	0	153	189
28 Sep	8	4	0	31	43
29 Sep	19	1	0	49	69
30 Sep	11	2	0	48	61
1 Oct	2	1	0	16	19
2 Oct	15	1	0	81	97
3 Oct	2	1	0	35	38
4 Oct	0	0	0	3	3
5 Oct	1	1	0	3	5
Total	321	43	4	1,510	1,878

Appendix J. Montross & Canzana. *The Inchon-Seoul Operation*, 1955

and protect the ancient city.

Operation Yo-Yo The Wonsan Landing

General MacArthur ordered General Almond to re-embark X Corps and execute a series of amphibious landings along the east coast of North Korea. The 1st Marine Division would board designated shipping at Inchon and land tactically at Wonsan, the main event. The 7th Division would proceed south to Pusan to board its ships for a subsequent landing north of Wonsan. The original D-Day for the Marines at Wonsan was 15 October. The actual landing date was not even close.

Operation Chromite was the codename for the Inchon landing. The troops would nickname the

Wonsan campaign “Operation Yo-Yo.”

Inchon and Wonsan serve as book-end examples of amphibious warfare’s risks and rewards. By all rights it should have been Inchon, with its legion of tactical and hydrographic dangers, that sputtered in execution. Wonsan, scheduled for attack by a larger and, by now, more experienced landing force against a sharply diminished enemy threat, should have been a snap. But in the irony of war, Inchon stands as a masterpiece, Wonsan as a laughingstock, as ill-conceived a landing as the United States ever conducted.

In late September 1950, there was nothing particularly wrong with the concept of a long-distance “Right Hook” amphibious landing from the Sea of Japan to seize

Wonsan and other smaller ports along the North Korean coast. Wonsan at the time represented a reasonable objective, and the 1st Marine Division had proven its amphibious prowess in the difficult landing at Inchon and was expected to be available for the new mission in early October.

Wonsan had the best natural harbor in the Korean peninsula. Located 80 miles north of the 38th Parallel, the port’s bulwark-like Kalma Peninsula provided an enormous sheltered harbor, a seven-inch tidal range, weak currents, rare fog, and a moderate beach gradient—all incomparably more favorable than Inchon. Wonsan’s near-shore topography also offered a decent lodgement area, suitable for a division beachhead, before the Taebaek

Mountains—eastern North Korea’s long, towering spine—reared upwards from the coastal plain. The port’s strategic appeal centered on the combination of its accessible harbor with a high-capacity airfield, petroleum refining facilities, and its location astride major railroads and high-

ways leading west to the North Korean capital of Pyongyang, north to Hungnam, and southwest to Seoul.

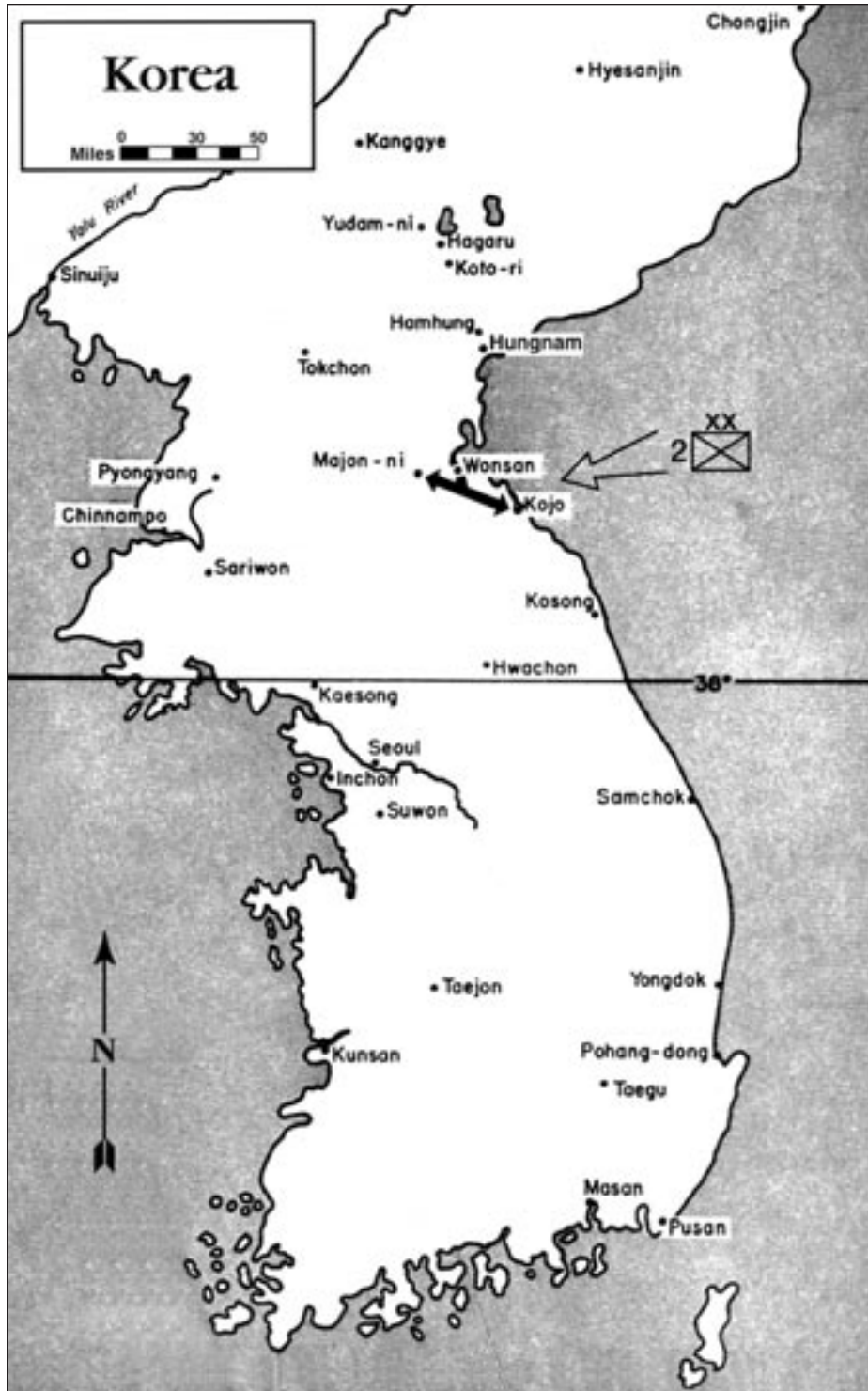
On 4 October, General Almond formally assigned the 1st Marine Division the mission of seizing and securing the X Corps base of operations at Wonsan, protecting the

airfield, and continuing inland operations as assigned. Three unforeseen developments almost immediately knocked the Wonsan plans into a cocked hat: massive port congestion; a drastically accelerated invasion of North Korea; and the successful mining of their coastal ports by the North Koreans. As a consequence, MacArthur’s celebrated “Right Hook” became suspended in mid-air, leaving the Marines (and all of X Corps) hanging in limbo—out of action—throughout a critical three-week period. The Wonsan landing, when it finally occurred, has been aptly described by military historians as “the most anticlimactic a landing as Marines have ever made.”

The 1st Marine Division operations order directed a simultaneous landing of the 1st and 7th Marines abreast on the eastern shore of the Kalma Peninsula, each supported by an artillery battalion and a battalion of Korean Marines. Wonsan airfield lay directly inland, as close to the landing beaches as Kadena and Yontan had been to the Hagushi beaches at Okinawa.

On 7 October, the day following the cemetery ceremony in Inchon, Major General O. P. Smith reported as landing force commander for the Wonsan expedition to Rear Admiral James H. Doyle, USN, commanding the Attack Force, U.S. Seventh Fleet. The division began embarking at Inchon the next day. It would take a week.

Here MacArthur’s plans began to unwind. No one, it seems, had foreseen the tremendous strain about to be placed on the only two medium-capacity ports available, Inchon and Pusan, during a time of conflicting requirements to offload the mammoth supplies needed for the Eighth Army’s invasion of western North Korea while simultaneously backloading two large divi-



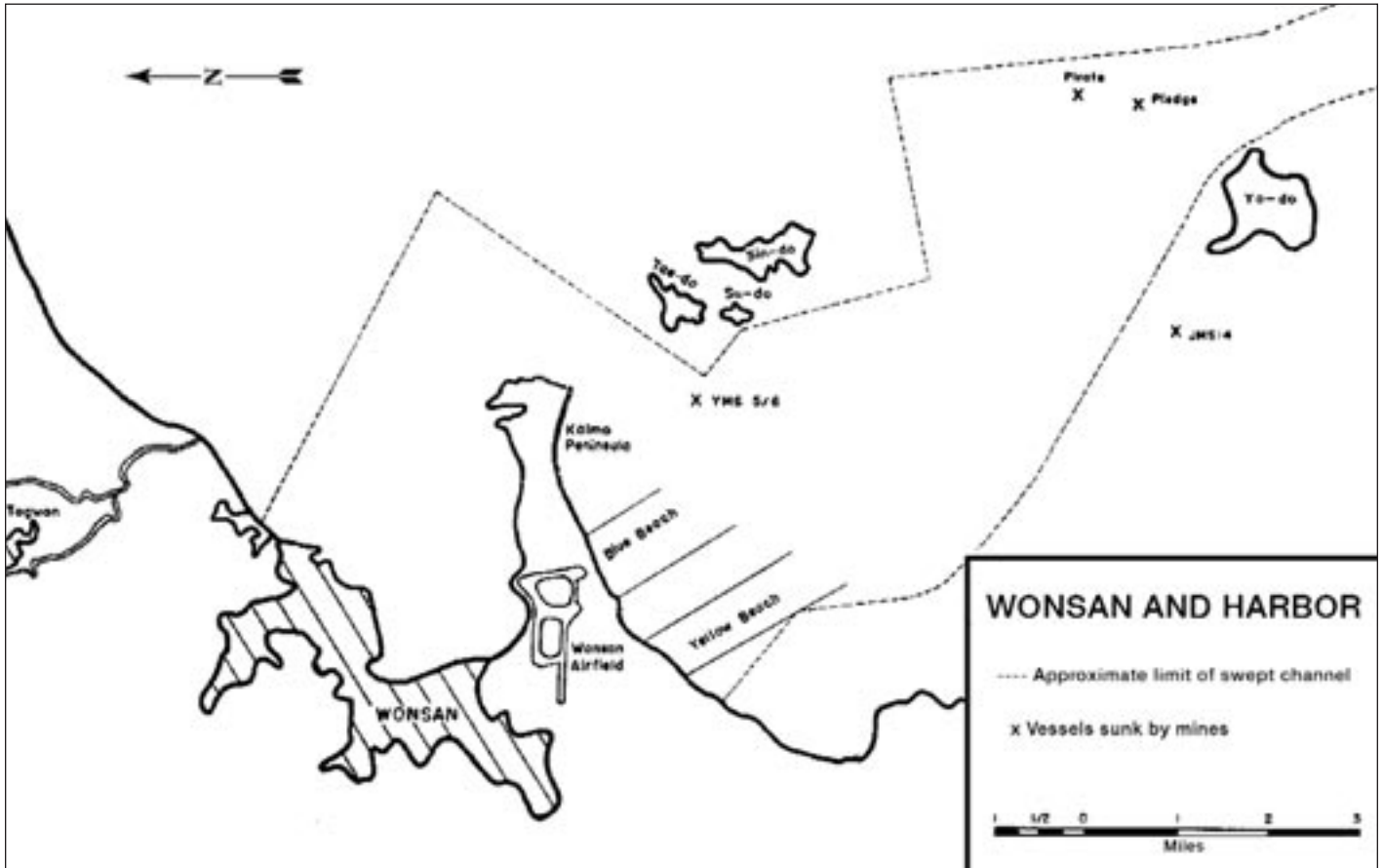


Gen Oliver P. Smith Collection, Marine Corps Research Center
 From left, MajGen Oliver P. Smith, MajGen Edward M. Almond, and RAdm James H. Doyle discuss plans for the Wonsan landing on board the Mount McKinley.

sions for the X Corps' "Right Hook." The piers, staging areas, and access roads in both ports

became impossibly congested. Chaos reigned. Combat loading for an opposed

amphibious assault is an exact and time-consuming science. The 1st Marine Division, now fully fleshed out with the 7th Marines and other missing components, had 25,840 officers and men on the rolls for the Wonsan expedition, easily the largest division of any nation fighting in the Korean War. Admiral Doyle's Attack Force contained 66 amphibious ships plus six commercial cargo ships, but many of the vessels arrived late in the crowded port, few contained the preloaded 10-day levels of Class I, II, and IV supplies as promised, and the Attack Force still provided insufficient total lift capacity for all the division's rolling stock. The precise art of combat loading became the improvised "art of the possible," but each compromise cost time. As the division's special action report dryly noted, General Almond's prescribed D-day of 15 October "was moved progressively



back to a tentative date of 20 October.”

As junior officer in Company B, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, Second Lieutenant Joseph R. Owen assumed the demanding duties of company embarkation officer. “We were assigned an old LST that our Navy had used in World War II,” he said, “but which was now leased to Japan for use as a cargo ship.” The Japanese captain spoke no English but conveyed to Owen by angry gestures his displeasure at what seemed to him to be gross overloading of his ship’s safe lift capacity. When Owen’s runner charged the bolt on his carbine the skipper abruptly acquiesced. “There was a shortage of shipping,” Owen rationalized, “and, we were informed, we would be afloat for only a few days.”

Private First Class Morgan Brainard of Company A, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, boarded his assigned LST without bitching: “All we knew at that moment was that we were steaming south; that we were in dry clothes with a roof over our heads, and assured of two hot meals a day and the chance to take salt water showers . . . Our slice of life seemed to be improving.”

Most of Admiral Doyle’s Wonsan Attack Force completed loading the 1st Marine Division and sortied from Inchon on 15 October, the original D-Day. By that time the other two factors that would render the planned assault meaningless had materialized. Five days earlier, Republic of Korea’s I Corps had seized Wonsan by overland advance from the south. On 13 October, Major General Field Harris, commander of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, flew into Wonsan airfield, followed the next day by the Checkerboards of Lieutenant Colonel Cole’s VMF-312 and other elements of Marine Aircraft Group 12.

In the meantime, Admiral Doyle’s advance force commander discovered that the North Koreans had sewn the approaches to Wonsan with more than 2,000 anti-ship mines, both contact and magnetic. The U.S. Navy had only 12 minesweepers available in theater—as compared to the 100 employed in support of the Okinawa landing five years earlier—and even when reinforced by Korean and Japanese craft, the mission proved overwhelming. Two U.S. minesweepers hit mines and sank on 12 October. Heavy fire from North Korean coast defense guns hampered rescue operations. A Japanese sweeper sank on the 18th; the next day a huge mine practically vaporized a South Korean craft. Doyle’s experiments in dropping 1,000-pound bombs and anti-submarine depth charges to create enough overpressure to detonate nearby mines failed. Even the fact that a linear, tactical landing had been replaced by a simpler administrative offload from amphibian tractors and landing craft in column did not help expedite the problem. Rear Admiral Allan E. Smith, commanding Task Force 95, the advance force, voiced the frustration of all hands when he reported: “we have lost control of the seas to a nation without a navy, using pre-World War I weapons, laid by vessels that were utilized at the time of the birth of Christ.”

General Almond’s frustration knew no bounds. On 20 October, with the war fast shifting away from his active influence (the Eighth Army entered the North Korean capital Pyongyang the previous day), and with no end in sight to the tedious minesweeping, Almond departed the flagship by helicopter and established his command post ashore at Wonsan.

As for the embarked Marines,

rampant rumors swept the transports, especially beginning the afternoon of 19 October when the task force suddenly got underway, heading south. “War’s over!” exclaimed many a Marine, “We’re going back to Pusan and then heading home!” But the ships were only taking new precautions to protect themselves in hostile waters. For the next week—and a week is a very long time at sea on board transports as claustrophobically crowded as these—the ships reversed course every 12 hours, first heading south, then north, then starting over. Here emerged the sarcastic nickname “Operation Yo-Yo.” As voiced by Marine Corps historians Lynn Montross and Nicholas A. Canzona in 1957: “Never did time die a harder death, and never did the grumblers have so much to grouse about.”

The Japanese-crewed LST transporting Lieutenant Owen’s company soon ran low on provisions and fresh water. As Owen recalled: “a three-week ordeal of misery and sickness . . . The stench below-decks made the air unbreathable.”

Before long sickness swept the embarked landing force. Long lines of Marines suffering from dysentery and gastroenteritis overwhelmed poorly-equipped sick bays. The “Binnacle List” on board the converted civilian transport *Marine Phoenix* ran to 750 Marines at the height of the epidemic. The attack transport *Bayfield* (APA 33) reported a confirmed case of smallpox. As a final insult to the division’s pride, a traveling USO show featuring Bob Hope and Marilyn Maxwell beat them to Wonsan, performing for an appreciative audience of Marine aviators and ROK soldiers while the fierce “spearhead” assault troops rocked in misery among the offshore swells.

At long last, on 26 October, the 1st Marine Division landed on the



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A4313

Finally off the ships, the 1st Marine Division, which ended its interminable "Operation Yo-Yo" on 26 October, chugs

ashore by Navy LCVP towards Wonsan, North Korea.

In the anticlimactic landing of the 1st Marine Division at Wonsan, troops dismount from a column of LVT-3Cs and their escorting LVTA-5 armored amphibians along the

Wonsan airfield. A chill wind blows in from the looming Taebaek Mountains.

Department of Defense Photo (USN) 421366





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) A130364

The 1st Marine Division suffered the ignominy of landing at Wonsan weeks after South Korean forces had seized the port and the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing had arrived. Here a column of soaked infantrymen straggles ashore among good-hearted catcalls by VMF-312, the "Checkerboard" squadron.

Kalma Peninsula below Wonsan. "The day was bright and cold," recalled Private First Class Brainard of Company A, 1st Marines, "and the sea had a real chop to it as our [LVT] slid down the ramp and nosed forward into the water." The captain of Brainard's ship wished the departing Marines luck over the public address system, adding that MacArthur's headquarters had just announced that the troops should be "home by Christmas."

The airmen of the Checkerboard squadron hooted in derision as the infantry streamed ashore, puffing with exertion after three weeks of enforced inactivity. Lieutenant

Owen encountered more sarcastic insults from the ROK troops who had captured the town 16 days before: "They had learned the middle-finger salute, which they rendered to us with great enthusiasm."

Colonel Puller bristled at the ignominy of his regiment being categorized as rear echelon troops due to no fault of their own. Then Brigadier General Edward A. Craig met Puller on the beach with the welcome news that he had just been selected for promotion to brigadier general. Puller's trademark scowl vanished momentarily. Then he turned to the job at hand. His regiment was about to be dispersed over a huge area of enemy

territory, beginning with the deployment of Lieutenant Colonel Jack Hawkins' 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, on a special mission to relieve a ROK force guarding a supply depot at the coastal town of Kojo, 40 miles south.

Puller's dilemma reflected the drastic changes in United Nations' strategic objectives being formulated it seemed, day-by-day. The war in North Korea had evolved from the establishment of coastal operating bases and the methodical elimination of residual NKPA forces to a wide-open race to the Yalu River, the Chinese border. General O. P. Smith, accustomed to a relatively narrow zone of action

in the Inchon-Seoul campaign, suddenly found himself responsible for a zone measuring 300 miles long by 50 miles deep. With General Almond already calling for two infantry regiments to advance as far north as Hamhung, Smith knew Puller's 1st Marines would

be hard-pressed to cover an uncommonly large piece of real estate around the port of Wonsan. The Kojo assignment was but the first of several far-flung missions Puller would have to handle.

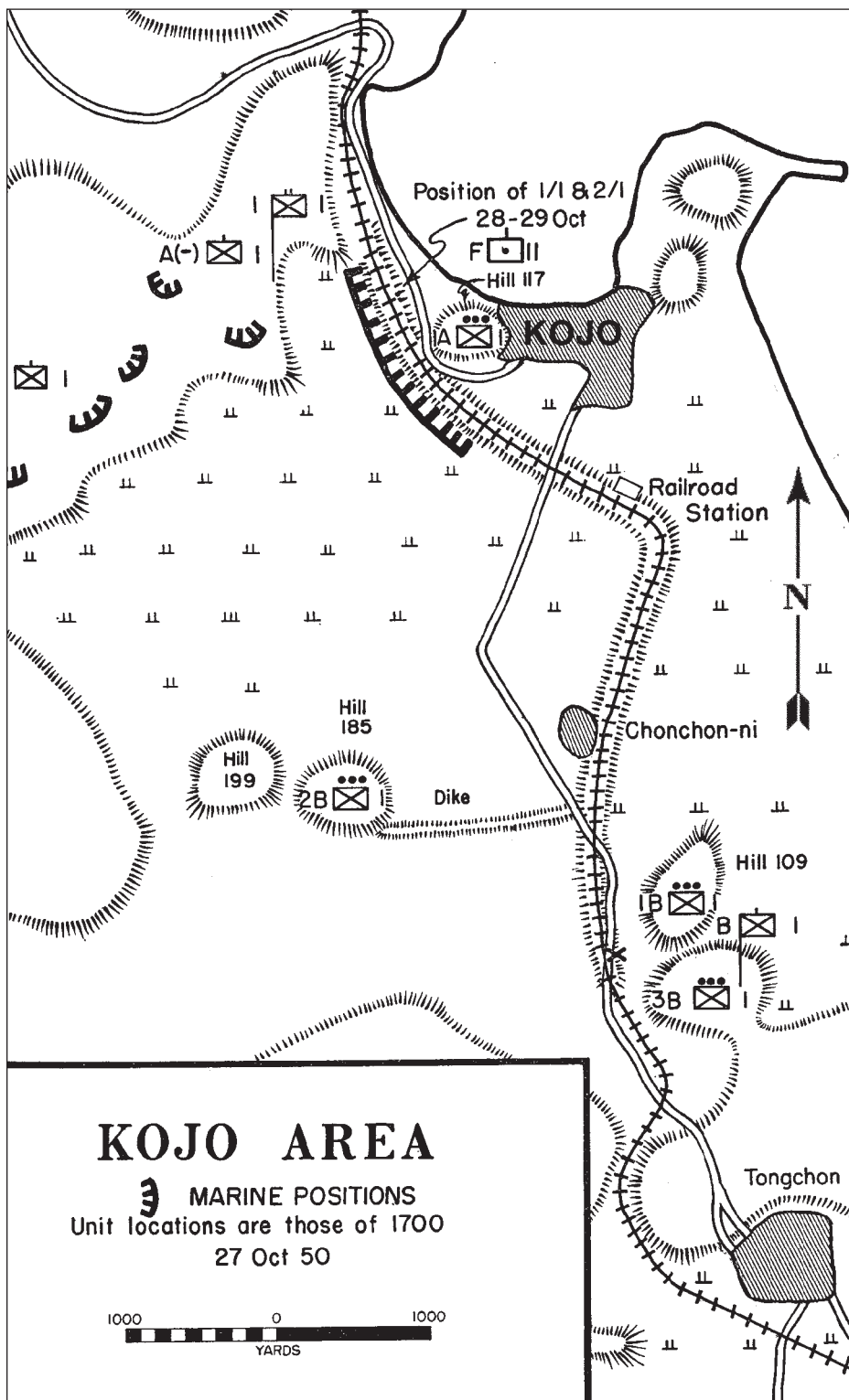
Half of Hawkins' battalion departed within hours after their

landing on the 26th. The troops were still shaking out their sea legs when they clambered into a long line of empty gondola cars of a coal train bound for Kojo. It was an uncomfortable and singularly dirty ride. Captain Barrow noted that the residual coal "left a mark on all of us." The train had to make two trips to deliver the entire battalion, and those units traveling by road, like the attached artillery battery, did not arrive until the second night.

The troops dismounted from the train at Kojo stiff and disoriented. The town itself proved picturesque, but the supply dump had been largely emptied by the departing ROK garrison, too many hills dominated the town, and there was a critical lack of intelligence about a North Korean "guerilla force" reportedly lurking in the area. "Quite candidly," admitted Barrow, "I never understood our mission."

The situation bothered Hawkins acutely. The late-afternoon approach of 3,000 refugees towards Kojo made him more uneasy. These Hawkins diverted into an assembly area outside the seaport, but their unimpeded approach reflected the vulnerability of his position. The largely depleted supply dump lay in low ground, difficult to defend. A well-defined avenue of approach into the seaport lay open from the south and southwest. "Therefore," Hawkins wrote shortly after the Kojo action, "I decided to place Company B in outpost positions to cover these approaches The remainder of the battalion would be deployed on the hill massif west of Kojo."

Accordingly, Captain Wesley C. Noren deployed Company B on outpost duty along three scattered hills two miles south of town. As night fell, Noren placed his men





Gen Oliver P. Smith Collection, Marine Corps Research Center

Men of the 1st Marines sweep through the village of Kojo following the sudden, violent, and well-coordinated North Korean night attacks of 27 October on the 1st Battalion's positions.

on 50 percent alert: each foxhole to contain one man awake, the other halfway zipped-up in his sleeping bag. The night was chilly; that morning the Marines had discovered the first ice of the season in the rice paddies. Their last firefight in burning Seoul a month ago had left them gasping in the heat. Now they began to shiver.

The security measures prescribed by Hawkins and Noren were normal under the assumed threat—light probing attacks by small bands of guerrillas. No one then knew that Noren's dispersed platoons had taken their night positions within direct observation of a significant organized force, the *10th Regiment, 5th NKPA Division*. Colonel Cho Il Kwon commanded

this regiment, one of the highly disciplined forces led by veterans of the fighting in China that had spearheaded the invasion of South Korea four months earlier. Cho and his men had successfully evaded the "hammer and anvil" trap set by the United Nations forces after Inchon and returned essentially intact across the border. The regiment had left its tanks and artillery along the Naktong River, but still possessed plenty of mortars and machine guns. With more than a thousand assault troops at hand, Cho had the numbers and leadership to overwhelm Noren's outposts and simultaneously attack the flank of Hawkins' main positions west of Kojo.

Rarely in their long history had

the 1st Marines been in such mortal danger. Cho's veterans moved out of their staging areas at nightfall and approached each outpost with disciplined stealth. These men were superb night-fighters. Some infiltrated undetected to within 10 feet of the nearest Marine foxholes. At precisely 2200, they attacked with sub-machine guns, grenades, and shrill screams.

Noren's rifle squads never had a chance. Seven Marines died in one platoon before they could even scramble out of their sleeping bags. Vicious hand-to-hand fighting swept the hilltops. Some units were cut off and scattered. Well-drilled junior non-commissioned officers grabbed disorganized indi-



Sketch by Col Charles H. Waterhouse, USMCR (Ret)

A Navy corpsman drags a wounded Marine out of the line of fire. The artist added the Red Cross band on the corpsman's arm to provide color to the composition, admitting in his original caption that most corpsmen discarded the brassard as too tempting a target to enemy snipers.

viduals and formed small counter-attacks. When the 1st Platoon, abruptly missing 30 men, had to abandon Hill 109 just north of Noren's command post, Sergeant Clayton Roberts singlehandedly covered their withdrawal with his light machine gun until the North Koreans slipped in close and killed him.

Captain Noren kept his head, swiftly calling in mortar fire and trying to make sense of the pandemonium. One thing was sure—this was no guerrilla band. Judged by their night-fighting skills alone, Noren knew he was under attack by one of the original *Inmin Gun* outfits, supposedly destroyed by the United Nations' breakout.

Captain Noren held the scattered pieces of his beleaguered company together until 2350, no small achievement in the confusion, then radioed Hawkins for permission to withdraw. Hawkins assented. The battalion comman-

der was much more in the dark than Noren, but he knew that Captain Robert P. Wray's Company C on the right rear flank had been hit hard by a violent surprise attack. Noren then executed a masterful point-by-point withdrawal under extreme enemy pressure. By 0200, he organized the surviving members of Baker Company into a 360-degree defensive circle along the railroad tracks about 2,500 yards below Kojo. At 0300, Noren established radio contact with the 4.2-inch mortar platoon whose steady fire then helped disrupt the NKPA forces converging on the small band.

Noren held his new position throughout the rest of the night. At the first grayness of dawn he began evacuating his wounded, dragging them north in ponchos through the thin ice and thick mud of the rice paddies. Suddenly a force of 200 of Colonel Cho's night fighters appeared out of the

gloom, heading south, like vampires trying to outrun the sun. There was just enough light for the entire battalion to enjoy a "Turkey Shoot," including the newly arrived Battery F, 2d Battalion, 11th Marines. Seventy-five of this group of North Koreans never made it back to their sanctuary. Perhaps twice again as many NKPA bodies lay within the original Marine positions.

Fragmented reports of a major attack against 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, at Kojo began to arrive at the division command post around 0700 the next morning. Coincidentally, the first three helicopters of VMO-6 were just being ferried from Kimpo to Wonsan airfield. Captain Gene W. Morrison recalled landing at Wonsan during the emergency and not even shutting down his helicopter. He received an urgent cockpit briefing, then lifted off immediately for Kojo on a medical evacuation mission.

The sudden violence of the well-coordinated NKPA night attacks had shocked Lieutenant Colonel Hawkins deeply. His reports to division throughout the 28th reflected the concerns of an isolated commander under protracted stress: "Received determined attack . . . from sunset to sunrise by large enemy force," he reported in one message that reached General Smith about 1230. "One company still heavily engaged . . . Have suffered 9 KIA, 39 WIA, 34 MIA probably dead . . . If this position is to be held a regiment is required . . . Shall we hold here or withdraw to North? Send all available helicopters for wounded."

Smith directed Colonel Bowser to send Puller and an additional battalion of the 1st Marines by immediate train to reinforce Hawkins. Smith also arranged for air strikes, destroyer bombard-

Aerial Medical Evacuation

A dramatic improvement in medical care for combat casualties became evident by the end of the Seoul campaign. According to historian J. Robert Moskin, Navy surgeons operated on 2,484 patients during the fighting for Inchon and Seoul. Only nine of these men died, a remarkable advance in the survival rate of those casualties who made it back to an aid station. Several factors contributed to this breakthrough, but one notable newcomer was the increased use of organic observation aircraft—principally the helicopter—for medical evacuation of severely wounded men.

The use of Marine Corps aircraft to evacuate casualties under fire began as early as 1928 in Nicaragua when First Lieutenant Christian F. Schilt landed his O2U Corsair biplane in the dusty streets of Quilali, a bravura performance, repeated 10 times, that resulted in the rescue of 20 men and a Medal of Honor for the intrepid pilot. Later, during the 1945 battle for Okinawa's Kunishi Ridge, the Marines evacuated hundreds of their casualties to a rear hospital by experimental use of their OY-1 single-engine observation aircraft, which trundled aloft from a dirt road just behind the front lines.

Marine Observation Squadron 6 (VMO-6) had been one of the observation squadrons that evacuated wounded men from the Kunishi Ridge battlefield. In Korea five years later the squadron again supported the 1st Marine Division. While the OY-1s occasionally transported wounded men in 1950, the mission increasingly became the province of the squadron's helicopters, the nation's first wartime use of the new technology.

The VMO-6 pilots flew Sikorsky HO3S-1 observation helicopters during the Seoul campaign. A bench seat behind the pilot could accommodate three passengers, but there was insufficient room in the cabin for a stretcher. To evacuate a non-ambulatory patient, according to historians (and helicopter pilots) Lieutenant Colonel Gary W. Parker and Major Frank M. Batha, Jr., the crew had to remove the right rear window and load the stretcher headfirst through the gap. The casualty's feet jutted out the open window.

Primitive as this arrangement may have been, the pilots of VMO-6 safely evacuated 139 critically wounded Marines during the Seoul campaign. Most of these men owed their lives to this timely evacuation. An unspoken but significant side benefit to these missions of mercy was their impact on the morale of the Marines still engaged in combat. Simply knowing that this marvelous new flying machine was on call to evacuate their buddies or themselves should the need arise was greatly reassuring.

The proficiency of the VMO-6 helicopter pilots proved reassuring to the fixed-wing pilots as well. A

Marine helicopter had rescued Marine Aircraft Group 33's first downed aviator as early as the second day of the 1st Brigade's commitment to the Pusan Peninsula. Included in Major Robert P. Keller's post-Seoul campaign evaluation of his Black Sheep squadron's role in close air support operations were these comments: "The helicopters have done a wonderful service in rescuing downed pilots under the very guns of the enemy. The pilot should not start out cross country unless he is sure that helicopters are available."

Major Vincent J. Gottschalk's VMO-6 lost two OY-1s and two helicopters to enemy fire during the Seoul campaign. Fortunately, at least, none of the aircraft were transporting casualties at the time. Three months later, the squadron would transition to the Bell HTL-4 helicopter which could carry a stretcher mounted on each skid, in effect doubling the medical evacuation payload. In August 1951, in one of the high points of Marine Corps aviation history, Major General Christian F. Schilt, the hero of long-ago Quilali, took command of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing in Korea.

National Archives Photo (USN) 80-A20546



ment, and a hospital-configured LST to be dispatched to Hawkins' aid.

Hawkins, convinced that the NKPA would return that night in great force, continued to send alarming messages to General Smith, but things had calmed down when Puller arrived with Sutter's 2d Battalion, 1st Marines, at 2230. There were no further attacks by the *10th NKPA Regiment*. Puller was decidedly unsympathetic to Hawkins' concerns (and in fact would replace him in command of 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, with Lieutenant Colonel Donald M. Schmuck a week later).

The next day, Captain Noren led

a patrol south to recover a number of his missing troops who had gone to ground after being cut off during the night. Similarly, Captain George B. Farish, a VMO-6 helicopter pilot on a reconnaissance mission below Kojo, spotted the word "HELP" spelled out in rice straw in an open field, landed warily, and promptly retrieved smart-thinking Private First Class William H. Meister, one of Noren's lost sheep, from his nearby hiding place. The battalion's final count for that bloody night came to 23 killed, 47 wounded, and 4 missing.

On the same day, Captain Barrow led Company A south on a reconnaissance in force, accompanied by a destroyer offshore and a

section of Corsairs overhead. Just as he reached his assigned turnaround point, a Corsair pilot advised him that a large number of enemy troops were digging in several miles farther south. Barrow directed the pilot to expend his ordnance on the target. He did so. Barrow then asked him if he could adjust naval gunfire. "Yeah, I can do that," came the reply. For the next half-hour the destroyer delivered a brisk fire, expertly adjusted by the pilot, who at the end reported many casualties and fleeing remnants. Barrow returned to Kojo without firing a shot, but fully convinced he had avenged Baker Company and taught his unknown opponent a lesson in

With the Kojo area secured, the 1st Marines, in coordination with Marine Corsairs, move out in reconnaissance in force.

Gen Oliver P. Smith Collection, Marine Corps Research Center





National Archives Photo (USMC) 127-N-A4553

The 5th Marines load on board a patched-up train for the move north to Hamhung in pursuit of the retreating North Koreans

combined arms firepower.

O. P. Smith could illafford to keep Puller and two battalions so far below Wonsan. With the 7th and 5th Marines already on their way far northward towards Hamhung, and an urgent requirement at hand for 3d Battalion, 1st Marines to proceed to Majon-ni, Smith had no Marine infantry units left to cover Wonsan's port, airfield, and road junctions. Members of the 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion and other combat support Marines doubled as riflemen to fill the gaps until Puller's force

returned in early November. The 1st Marine Division, however, would remain widely dispersed, a continuing concern to Smith. Indeed, his three infantry regiments would not be linked up for six weeks, from the administrative landing at Wonsan until the withdrawing columns from the Chosin Reservoir fought their way down to Chinhung-ni during the second week in December.

Other changes were in the wind. On 29 October, General Barr's 7th Division commenced its administrative landing at the small port of

Iwon, another 60 miles above Hungnam. In the dramatic but strategically unsound "Race to the Yalu," two of Barr's units would become the only U.S. forces to actually reach the river. Meanwhile General Almond continued to look for opportunities to exploit the 1st Marine Division's amphibious capabilities. When Puller returned from Kojo, Almond warned him to be ready for an amphibious landing 220 miles northeast of Wonsan. The target was Chongjin, a seaport dangerously near the North Korean border with the Soviet Union.

Colonel Puller wasted little time worrying about another "End Run." Of more immediate concern to him was the commitment of Lieutenant Colonel Ridge's 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, to the defense of the key road junction at Majon-ni, a deployment that would last 17 days and provoke a dozen sharp firefights.

The mountain town of Majon-ni occupied a bowl-like plateau, encircled by higher ground, about 26 miles west-southwest of Wonsan. The roads from Wonsan, Pyongyang, and Seoul intersect here, and the highlands contain the headwaters of the Imjin River. Ridge's battalion arrived on 28 October to provide a screening and blocking force.

The terrain around Majon-ni lent itself more readily to the defense than Kojo, but Kojo had been much more accessible for the Marines. There were no rail lines, and the "highway" from Wonsan was a single-lane road that twisted through mountain passes, switchbacks, hairpin turns, and precipitous dropoffs. The troops called it "Ambush Alley."

In 1978, two Marine generals recalled their experiences as young officers involved in the defense and resupply of Majon-ni. To

Brigadier General Edwin H. Simmons, the Majon-ni mission was a difficult defensive line that had to be covered with a thin perimeter, thus providing 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, with good practice for their similar challenge ahead at Hagaru-ri, the crossroads mountain village situated at the southeastern edge of the Chosin Reservoir. "Majon-ni was a dress rehearsal for what was going to come up for us at Hagaru-ri," he said. For his part, General Robert H. Barrow considered Majon-ni more a precursor for Khe Sanh in 1968, a remote plateau in the mountains "at the end of a long, tenuous supply route in no-man's land."

Elements of the 15th NKPA Division opposed Ridge's battalion in the mountains around Majon-ni. While more disorganized and much less proficient than the 10th

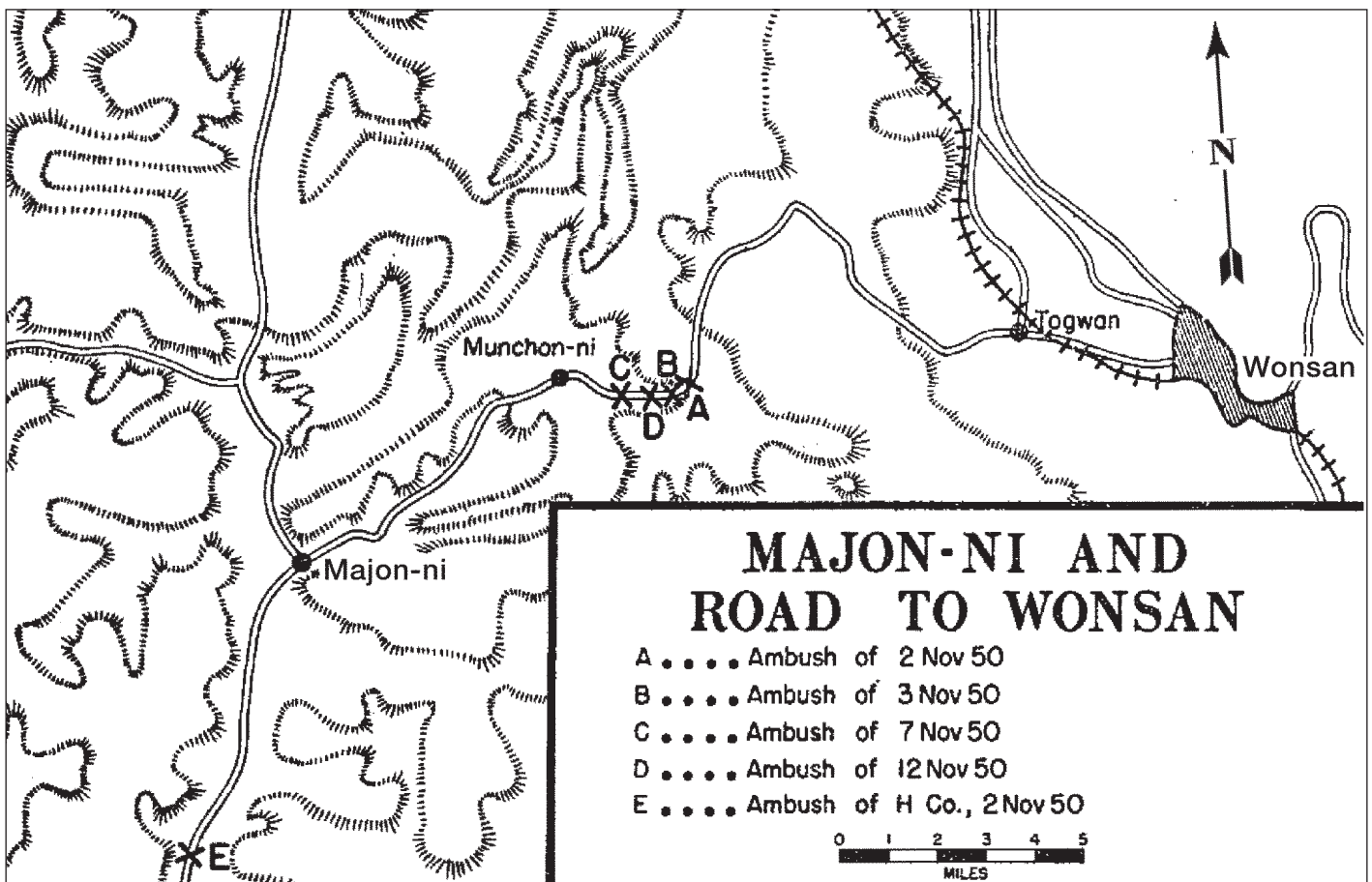
Regiment that had stung Hawkins' 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, so painfully at Kojo, these North Koreans were sufficiently trained fighters to threaten Ridge's perimeter each night and readily interdict the Marine convoys trundling carefully through Ambush Alley.

When Ridge went a week without resupply convoys being able to get through to Majon-ni, he requested an air drop of ammunition, gasoline, and rations. The 1st Air Delivery Platoon packaged 21 tons of these critical supplies into 152 parachutes. These were dropped over the Marine perimeter with uncommon accuracy by Air Force C-47s.

With ambushes occurring more frequently, Puller assigned Captain Barrow's Company A, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, to escort a 34-vehicle convoy from Wonsan to Majon-ni at mid-afternoon on 4

November. Barrow was uncomfortable with both the late start and the slow progress. The North Koreans struck the column with heavy fire late in the afternoon. "They picked a good spot," said Barrow. He called for air strikes through a patchwork network and tried to work his infantry up the steep slopes towards the ambushers. "It soon became apparent that we were not going to be successful . . . and the bad thing was nightfall was approaching." Stymied, and embarrassed by the failure, Barrow ordered the huge 6x6s and Jeeps with trailers to turn around, a harrowing experience under automatic weapons fire. One vehicle went over the side. The Marines formed "a bucket-brigade" to retrieve the injured men.

Back at Wonsan, Captain Barrow dreaded having to report





National Archives Photo (USMC) 127-N-A4492

Battery H, 11th Marines, runs its guns forward and prepares to go to work in support of the 7th Marines as the regimental combat team moves north from Hamhung into the mountains of North Korea.

his lack of success to Chesty Puller. He found Puller in a school classroom, appropriately seated at the teacher's desk. "Colonel, I have failed you," he said. "No you didn't, old man," Puller growled, not unkindly. "Have a seat." Puller offered Barrow a drink of bourbon, then asked him what he needed to get the convoy through the next day. "More daylight and a forward air controller," Barrow replied.

Barrow departed Wonsan early on the 5th, inspired by an innovative tactic he had devised during the night. The North Koreans, he realized, could hear the trucks laboring up the pass long before they hove into view. He would therefore detach a reinforced platoon to precede the convoy on

foot by several thousand yards—comforting for the convoy, although spooky for Second Lieutenant Donald R. Jones' point platoon.

Private First Class Morgan Brainard was a member of the second fire team in Jones' dismounted advance patrol. After four bends in the road he looked back and saw the far-distant trucks begin to move. "We were then so far ahead, that I couldn't hear their engines, only our labored breathing," he said. "It was a lonely, eerie feeling, forty-two of us plodding up a bleak mountain road by ourselves."

"It worked!" said Barrow. Jones' point team caught the North Koreans cooking rice along the road, totally unaware and non-tac-

tical. "We literally shot our way forward," said Brainard. More than 50 of the off-duty ambushers died in the surprise attack. "We just laid them out," Barrow recalled with obvious pride, adding, "sometimes the simplest solutions are the most successful."

Barrow delivered his convoy to Majon-ni, stayed to help 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, defend the perimeter against a large-scale night attack, then returned to Wonsan the next day, the emptied trucks now laden with more than 600 NKPA prisoners captured by Ridge's battalion. Yet Barrow's success did not end North Korean interdiction of the Marine convoys. They had learned their own lessons from their surprise defeat on 5 November and would fight

smarter in two additional ambushes the following week.

On 10 November, the 3d Korean Marine Corps Battalion reinforced 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, at Majon-ni. The Korean Marines joined their American counterparts in a brief but heartfelt celebration of the 175th Birthday of the U.S. Marine Corps. Ridge's bakers outdid themselves with the resources at hand—an uneven yet ambitiously large cake, smeared with C-Ration jam—but what the hell!

The North Koreans struck the Marine perimeter once more in force the night of 11-12 November, then faded back into the mountains. On the 14th, Lieutenant Colonel Ridge turned over defense of the village to an Army battalion from the newly arrived 3d Infantry Division and led his men back to Wonsan, pleased that 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, had acquitted itself well on such an isolated mission. The battalion sustained 65 casualties defending Majon-ni; another 90 Marines became casualties in

the series of convoy fights along Ambush Alley.

The Majon-ni mission ended three straight months of significant fighting between the Marines and main line elements of the North Korean Peoples' Army. Admirably supported by the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, the Marines had fought well from the start, expanded effortlessly from a small brigade to a full-strength division, executed one of the most difficult amphibious landings in history, and—with the help of their allies and Army elements of X Corps—recaptured an enormous capital city. The resurgence of the Marines' standing within the national security community in Washington was downright dramatic.

But that phase of the Korean War had ended. A new, starkly different, and more troublesome phase had begun. The deceptive promise of "Home by Christmas" seemed abruptly swept away by a bone-chilling wind out of the Taebaek Mountains, out of Manchuria, a har-

binge of an early winter—and perhaps something more ominous. By the time General Smith moved the division command post from Wonsan to Hungnam on 4 November, he had been receiving reports of Red Chinese troops south of the Yalu for 10 days. A patrol from 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, visited the headquarters of the 17th ROK Infantry near Sudong-ni on 31 October and confirmed the presence of prisoners of war from the *124th Division*, Chinese Communist Forces.

Colonel Homer Litzenberg, whose 7th Marines would lead the way into the Taebaek Mountains, warned his troops about the likelihood of a Third World War. "We can expect to meet Chinese Communist troops," he told them, "and it is important that we win the first battle. The results of that action will reverberate around the world, and we want to make sure that the outcome has an adverse effect in Moscow as well as Peiping."

The 7th Marines, wearing and carrying cold weather equipment, press north into the Taebaek Mountains in pursuit of North Korean forces. A burden now, they would come to depend on this gear in the coming month.

National Archives Photo (USMC) 127-N-A4524



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Colonel Alexander wrote the History and Museum Division's World War II 50th anniversary commemorative pamphlets on Tarawa, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa. His books include *A Fellowship of Valor: The Battle History of the U.S. Marines*; *Storm Landings. Epic Amphibious Battles of the Central Pacific*; *Utmost Savagery. The Three Days of Tarawa*; *Edson's Raiders: The 1st Marine Raider Battalion in WW II*; and (with Lieutenant Colonel Merrill L. Bartlett) *Sea Soldiers in the Cold War*. As chief military historian for Lou Reda Productions he has appeared in 15 documentaries for The History Channel and the Arts & Entertainment Network, including a four-part mini-series on the Korean War, "Fire and Ice."



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