

DEFINING MOMENTS
THE KOREAN WAR



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Amnigraphics

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Chapter 5

THE INCHON INVASION



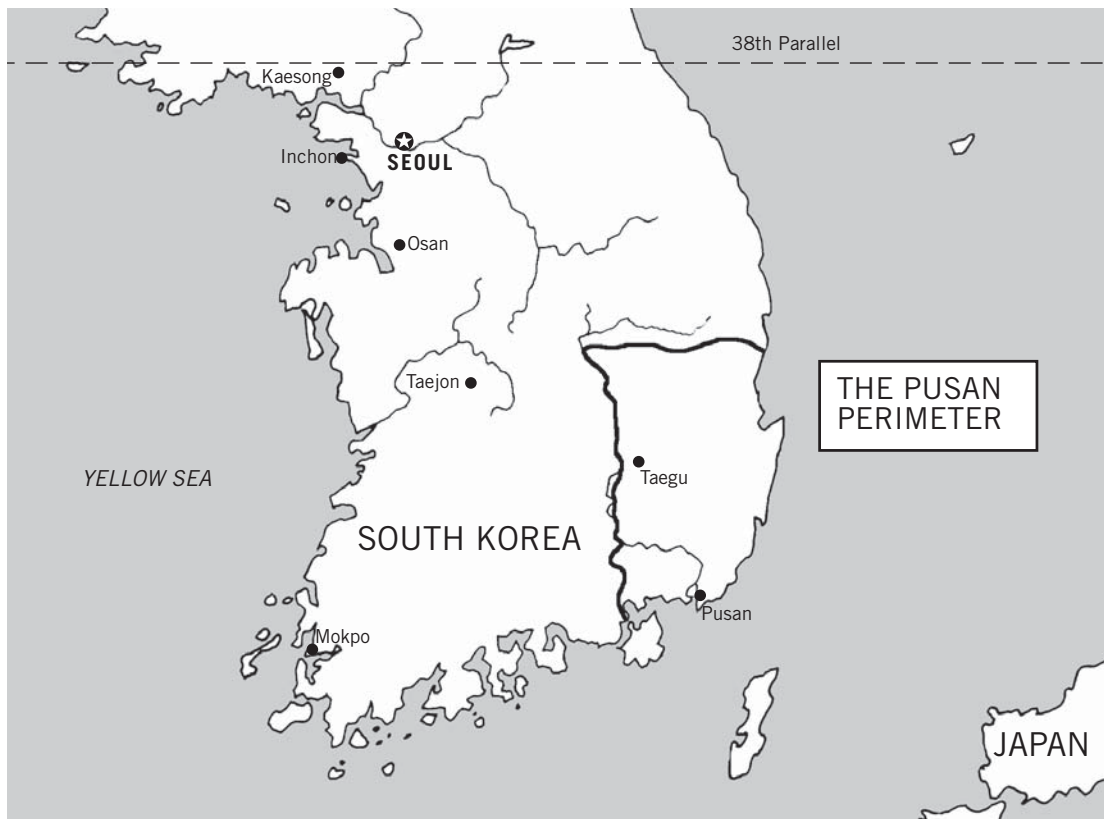
We shall land at Inchon and I shall crush them.

—General Douglas MacArthur

By August 1, 1950, scarcely a month had passed since UN forces led by the United States first encountered the NKPA. UN forces had been pushed back to a tiny holdout at the southern tip of the Korean peninsula. The United States Eighth Army had suffered more than 6,000 casualties, including 1,884 killed, 2,695 wounded, 523 missing, and 901 taken prisoner. The casualties incurred by the South Korean military (ROK) were a staggering 70,000. At the time, U.S. military leaders estimated North Korean (NKPA) casualties at between 31,000 and 37,000 soldiers. Much later, it was learned that by August 1, the NKPA had lost nearly 58,000 troops.

By August 1, when the Pusan Perimeter was established, some estimates suggest that the NKPA forces numbered 70,000. UN forces, consisting of about 45,000 ROK soldiers and 30,000 American troops, slightly outnumbered the enemy when the perimeter line was drawn. However, long-awaited reinforcements from both the Army and the Marines arrived on August 4, bringing the total UN forces to 92,000. In addition, much-needed equipment and updated weaponry arrived every day, including bazookas capable of piercing the heavily armored T-34 tanks. The most significant addition to the UN force was the arrival of several tank battalions manning new Sherman tanks. This gave the Eighth Army an armored force it had lacked in the first operations.

While heavy fighting continued along the new lines behind the Naktong River, the establishment of the Pusan Perimeter permitted American military



The Pusan Perimeter

leaders to reassess their strategy and adjust their assumptions about the enemy. Responding to the alarming rate at which U.S. forces had been beaten back, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) sent top staff to Tokyo to meet with MacArthur and to conduct a brief tour of the UN position to assess the situation. Among that group was General Matthew B. Ridgway, whose candid observations ultimately led to significant changes in the way the United States fought the NKPA (see Ridgway biography, p. 159).

Ridgway noted with dismay that the commander of the Eighth Army, General Johnnie Walker, could not even name top commanders in the ROK. He saw this as a clear indication that U.S. and ROK forces were not coordinating their efforts. He spoke critically of the Eighth Army, decrying “a lack of knowledge of infantry fundamentals ... a lack of leadership in combat eche-

lons” and “the absence of an aggressive fighting spirit.” Ridgway’s report to the JCS pulled no punches:

[The quality of the U.S.] soldier now engaged in Korea is not up to World War II standards. [U.S. troops] are easily stampeded. When attacked they do not respond with the fundamental infantry reaction to fire and movement, but instead call for artillery and air support and then withdraw if this does not suffice to interrupt the attack. Our troops do not counter-attack an enemy penetration. Our forces do not maintain outpost protection nor flank protection.... Our troops do not dig in and make no pretense at camouflaging their positions. They do not seek cover and concealment while moving by day.... They are visible to the enemy by terrestrial [ground] observation.... Tactical air support is not satisfactory.



General Matthew Ridgway talking with an American soldier in Korea.

Privately, Ridgway believed Walker should be relieved of his command. But he refrained from saying so. He knew that if he made such comments, it might appear that they were motivated by a desire to serve in Walker’s place. Regarding General Douglas MacArthur, Ridgway expressed nothing but admiration. Years later, in fact, he described MacArthur as “confident, optimistic, proud, eloquent, and utterly without fear.”

Before the group of top JCS staffers left the Far East to return to Washington, they met with MacArthur at his command headquarters in Tokyo on August 8. At this meeting, MacArthur spent two and a half hours telling the group in great detail and with great passion how he would win the war in Korea. He truly believed that time was of the essence and that the United States needed to initiate a decisive move before the winter months set in.

With this in mind, MacArthur called for a daring amphibious assault on the South Korean port of Inchon, now located behind NKPA frontlines. To invade at Inchon, MacArthur would need additional forces beyond those

A Woman in Combat

Marguerite Higgins was an exceptional person: at a time when few women were in male-dominated fields like journalism, she had the distinction of being the only female correspondent in combat during the Korean War. She was a veteran reporter, having accompanied U.S. forces during the liberation of Nazi death camps at the end of World War II. She became the Far East Bureau Chief for the *New York Herald Tribune* in May 1950 in Tokyo, Japan.

Just a month into her new job, war broke out in Korea. She was there, with the troops, within two days. Being a war correspondent is a tough job for anyone—15 journalists were killed during the course of the Korean War—but it was even tougher for a woman. Higgins had to endure not only harsh conditions, but also sexist attitudes and behavior from enlisted men, officers, and her male counterparts. Several months into the conflict, General Johnnie Walker ordered her home; MacArthur overruled this order and Higgins stayed, but that didn't make her job any easier. She related much of her experience in *War in Korea: The Report of a Woman Combat Correspondent*, published in 1951. She accompanied the U.S. Marines that landed at Inchon, and her story of that event is excerpted here:

I was to go in the fifth wave to hit at Red Beach.... It was an ear-shattering experience. We had to thread our way past the cruisers and carriers that were booming away at the beach, giving it a final, deadly pounding. The quake and roar of the rocket ships was almost unendurable.

already committed to Korea. Prior to the August 8 meeting, however, Ridgway, the JCS, and its top staffers were united in their conviction that MacArthur should not be given those forces.

MacArthur, though, made an impassioned and persuasive case for the Inchon plan at the meeting. “He won us all over to his views,” Ridgway later wrote. “I know that after this brilliant exposition, and after I had studied the plans for ... the Inchon landing, my own doubts were dissolved. On the return flight, [we] agreed that we were prepared to support MacArthur's request

After 20 minutes we rounded Wolmi Island—it looked as if a giant forest fire had just swept over it. Beyond was Red Beach. As we strained to see it more clearly, a rocket hit a round oil tower and big, ugly smoke rings billowed up. The dockside buildings were brilliant with flames. Through the flames it looked as though the whole city was burning.

Higgins approached the Inchon waterfront in a landing craft that came under heavy machine gun fire from the North Koreans, and she and the Marines crouched low as the boat lunged onto the beach next to a sea wall. The lieutenant in charge ordered the troops out of the landing craft, shoving them as they exited. Soon Higgins found herself crawling on the beach with 50 or 60 Marines, inching their way toward the sea wall. When one Marine next to Higgins ventured over the sea wall,

He jumped back so hurriedly that he stamped one foot hard on to my bottom. This fortunately had considerable padding, but it did hurt, and I'm afraid I said somewhat snappishly, "Hey, it isn't as frantic as all that." He removed his foot hastily and apologized in a tone that indicated his amazement that he had been walking on a woman. I think he was the only marine who recognized me as a woman—my helmet and overcoat were good camouflage.

Higgins relates her story with a sense of humor, underplaying the bravery required to be a war correspondent on the front lines. She voluntarily put herself in a dangerous situation to report the events of the war to people back in the United States. In doing so, she also furthered the cause of women breaking into a traditionally male-dominated profession.

when we got home." By August 18, Truman had agreed to commit another division (about 15,000 troops) to MacArthur and his planned offensive.

Turning the Tide: Naktong Bulge, Taegu, and "Bowling Alley"

Throughout the month of August 1950, the NKPA continued to hammer UN forces along the Pusan Perimeter. North Korean premier Kim Il Sung had tried to rally his troops to "take Pusan by Liberation Day," August 15, the

anniversary of Korean independence from Japan in 1945. Reinforcements of fresh UN forces armed with heavy artillery, tanks, and improved air support thwarted this ambitious goal, however. Soon, North Korea shifted its mission to trying to take the city of Taegu by Liberation Day. Taegu was where Syngman Rhee, president of the ROK, had set up his government after fleeing Seoul.

The tide was about to turn, however, in favor of the UN forces. Buoyed by reinforcements and a clearer understanding of NKPA tactics, American and South Korean troops registered a series of important, hard-fought victories in the defense of the Pusan Perimeter.

The first of these triumphs took place at the “Naktong Bulge,” a curving stretch of the Naktong River about seven miles north of where it meets the Nam River. On August 5, the North Koreans launched an attack against the American forces by crossing the Naktong at night (the NKPA often staged assaults at night because it limited the effectiveness of American aircraft and artillery). They had built underwater bridges made up of sandbags, barrels, logs, and rocks. These bridges, rising from the riverbed itself, enabled the NKPA to bring heavy equipment and hundreds of men across with little difficulty. In fighting that lasted several days, the NKPA was able to penetrate almost eight miles into the Pusan perimeter. But newly arrived troops from the U.S. Marines were called in. Utilizing a combination of air power (both bombing and machine gun strafing) and coordinated ground attacks with U.S. troops, UN forces drove the NKPA back across the Naktong.

Still, Kim Il Sung and the NKPA were determined to try to take Taegu. By August 15, the NKPA had worn down ROK defenses and pushed as far as Tabu, about 15 miles from Taegu. Determined to stop the advance, General Johnnie Walker sent a tough Army outfit known as The Wolfhounds (officially the 27th regiment) to pitch in with ROK forces to stop the NKPA.

Deploying in a two-mile pass between two small mountain ranges, the Wolfhounds and the ROK staged a blistering defense against the NKPA. The Wolfhounds were fully prepared for any approach by the road, with land mines and heavy artillery in place. Each night, a column of NKPA tanks would appear, only to have the forward tanks blasted by UN fire. The North Korean column would then withdraw, only to repeat their movements the following day. This seven-night battle came to be known as “The Bowling Alley,” both for the noise, which sounded like pins being knocked down in a bowling alley, and the per-

sistent, repetitive approach of the NKPA tanks. In his memoir *From Pusan to Panmunjom*, ROK commander General Paik Sun Yup remarked, “At the time, I found it difficult to understand the Americans’ humor when they referred to a grisly battlefield with such a lighthearted term.” Indeed, the NKPA suffered as many as 4,000 casualties before they finally abandoned this effort.

Taegu had been saved, a triumph that provided a badly needed psychological lift to UN forces. The NKPA, meanwhile, had been badly battered in its attempt to break through the Pusan Perimeter. It suffered about 10,000 casualties by month’s end, and its line of supply had been stretched more than 200 miles by the offensive, making it exceptionally vulnerable to enemy attack.

If MacArthur’s plan to invade North Korean-held territory was ever going to work, the time was now.

The Risks at Inchon

The plan to invade Inchon was risky but carried potentially enormous benefits if it was successfully executed. The amphibious landing would take NKPA forces, which were weak everywhere except at the Pusan Perimeter, by surprise. If UN forces took the city, they could then easily cut supply lines from North Korea and trap NKPA troops operating in the south. A landing at Inchon would also enable UN forces to re-take Seoul, the South Korean capital. Part of the plan, too, was for Walker’s Eighth Army to bust out of the Pusan Perimeter so that NKPA forces would be trapped between “giant pincers,” according to MacArthur.

Many analysts continued to voice doubts about the plan’s chances of success, however. For example, some military leaders doubted whether Walker’s forces had enough manpower and hardware to successfully push out of Pusan. They pointed out that some of the forces defending the Perimeter were to be pulled out and shipped to Inchon for the invasion, reducing the number of troops that would be available to Walker. Further, an advance of 180 miles to the north was a lot to ask of men who were already exhausted from weeks of brutal fighting.

Doubts were also raised about the terrain that awaited any invading force at Inchon. “We drew up a list of every natural and geographic handicap—and Inchon had ‘em all,” remarked one naval officer. One difficulty was the narrow opening to the harbor, which would make it easier for the NKPA



General Douglas MacArthur, shown here (center, seated) surveying the assault on Inchon from the deck of the *USS McKinley*, convinced numerous doubters that his invasion plan would succeed.

to defend with artillery and mines. Perhaps more daunting was the nature of the tides at Inchon. Because Inchon was a relatively shallow harbor, the tides were very long, with the seawater receding completely for hours, turning the landing area to vast mud flats. Any approach by large vessels would have to be done at the tides' highest points, which occurred twice a day, 12 hours apart. This would limit MacArthur's ability to launch a surprise attack.

In addition, strategists had to take into account the presence of a small island, called Wolmi, that guarded the entrance to the harbor. The island contained a garrison of heavily armed North Korean troops that would have to be defeated before the mainland assault could begin. Any assault on Wolmi,

however, would alert North Korean forces on the mainland to the presence of enemy troops.

Another obstacle confronting military strategists was the series of seawalls and piers that dominated the Pusan waterfront. Instead of landing on a large beach, the assault troops would be forced to scale the seawalls with ladders, which could expose them to withering fire from North Korean troops. And even if U.S. and South Korean forces succeeded in entering the city, they faced the possibility of being drawn into an urban warfare scenario—one in which NKPA forces forced them to take the city one bloody street at a time.

Finally, the weather loomed as a potential threat—the proposed amphibious attack was scheduled for typhoon season, and a storm could make both the sea and land operation next to impossible.

Given these factors, many military leaders remained skeptical of MacArthur's Inchon plan. He responded by insisting that the element of surprise would be so great that victory would be assured. At an August 23 meeting in Tokyo of top military leaders—including Secretary of Defense Joe Collins—MacArthur continued to press for the Inchon invasion. “Are you content to let our troops stay in that bloody perimeter [Pusan] like beef cattle in the slaughterhouse?” he snapped. “Who will take the responsibility for such a tragedy? Certainly I will not.” Even though MacArthur acknowledged the risks and the difficulties of a landing at Inchon, he argued that “We must act now or we will die... . We shall land at Inchon and I will crush them.”

MacArthur's arguments carried the day, and preparations for the Inchon invasion accelerated. Forces tapped for the invasion included a combination of U.S. Army, U.S. Marine, and South Korean units, collectively called “X Corps,” led by MacArthur's chief of staff, Ned Almond.

The Inchon Invasion

In the days leading up to the planned date of the invasion, UN aircraft repeatedly bombed North Korean military positions in the Inchon region. Then, on the morning of September 13, 1950, 260 ships steamed toward Inchon in heavy seas with MacArthur at the helm. As feared, a typhoon struck the region, but fortunately it swung to the northeast, making seasickness the worst threat to the fighting forces aboard ship.



U.S. Marines in amphibious assault craft move toward Inchon.

On September 14, the first destroyers to reach Inchon's harbor discovered underwater mines. They quickly disarmed them, clearing the way for the landing force. The ships continued forward, drawing within shelling range of the NKPA fortifications on Wolmi Island at the mouth of the harbor. NKPA forces attacked, but withering fire from UN ships and aircraft soon silenced the North Korean artillery. The next morning, at high tide, U.S. Marines landed on Wolmi and were able to secure the island with relatively little resistance; no Marines were killed and only 17 were wounded.

On the afternoon of September 15, at about 5:00 p.m., the full invasion force rolled into Inchon Harbor at high tide. As MacArthur had expected, the North Koreans were completely unprepared for such an invasion. Even though the assault on Wolmi Island had alerted the mainland of trouble, the North Koreans had been unable to add to the 2,000 NKPA troops occupying Inchon at the time. As a result, the 13,000 U.S. Marines who poured ashore encountered

surprisingly little resistance. Only 21 Marines were killed in the liberation of the city, the loss of which constituted a devastating strategic and psychological blow to North Korea.

The attack had unfolded just as MacArthur had planned. In only two days of fighting, UN forces secured Inchon—both the harbor and the city—and captured Kimpo Airfield, just a few miles outside Inchon. The invasion cost UN forces little: there were only 174 casualties, including 21 deaths. More men and equipment followed the initial invasion force, bringing the total of UN troops to more than 50,000. With this assault, X Corps had established a new front well behind the enemy lines at the Pusan Perimeter.



A small South Korean child crying in the street as UN forces seize Inchon.

Breakout of the Pusan Perimeter

To the south, another offensive was looming. One day after the Inchon landing, on September 16, General Johnnie Walker launched his offensive against North Korean troops stationed along the Pusan Perimeter. Walker's Eighth Army troops were weary from weeks of continual fighting with the North Koreans, but morale was high with the news of the success of X Corps at Inchon. The offensive at the Pusan Perimeter was not without difficulties, though. One of the most formidable tasks was taking high ground commanded by the NKPA, and the first three days of the offensive did not go well. But the situation changed on September 19, when the two NKPA divisions that had been attacking the perimeter suddenly withdrew. It has never been determined what prompted the withdrawal, but historians speculate it was to move forces north to defend Seoul, which NKPA forces had captured early in the summer, from UN forces on the move from Inchon.

The Eighth Army, however, was challenged by an enormous engineering problem when they reached the Naktong River. Handicapped by what histori-



UN forces settle in after taking Inchon.

an Clay Blair termed “a scandalous shortage of bridging equipment and bridge builders,” crossing the river turned into a logistical nightmare. The Eighth Army’s progress slowed to a crawl, much to Walker’s frustration. When he heard a rumor at headquarters that MacArthur had said Walker wasn’t up to the task of leading the Eighth Army out of the Pusan Perimeter, he shot a communiqué to Tokyo: “I don’t want you to think I’m dragging my heels, but I have a river across my whole front and the two bridges I have don’t make much.”

Furthermore, much of the artillery, ammunition, and manpower that had once been at Walker’s disposal had been redeployed to Inchon. However, by making do with what it had and by exploiting the resources the NKPA had left

behind (like the underwater bridge they had built to cross the Naktong a month earlier), the Eighth Army was able to eventually jump the river and grind northward, even as the North Korean fighters—perhaps as many as 40,000 men—withdrawed to defend Seoul and to regroup farther north.

With the X Corps at Inchon and the Eighth Army driving north from Pusan, MacArthur's plan to trap NKPA forces between "giant pincers" seemed to be working.

Kim Il Sung (1912–1994)
President of North Korea

Kim Il Sung was born Kim Sung-ju on April 15, 1912, during the height of Japanese domination of the Korean peninsula. (In the Korean language, the “family name” or surname comes first; so, “Kim” is the last name in this case.) Kim later adopted “Il Sung” in remembrance of an earlier anti-Japanese resistance fighter who had died in action. There are significant differences in the accounts of Kim’s early life; there is the “official” version perpetrated by the Communist North Korean government and Kim himself, and there are other accounts by independent sources.



The state-sponsored versions of Kim’s biography generally paint him as a life-long Communist who was destined from an early age to become a leader of his people. It is believed that Kim was born to a peasant couple, but the official version is that his father was a schoolmaster. One legend of Kim as a young man is that he rebelled against his Japanese-controlled schoolmasters by scratching out the Japanese language titles of books with a penknife and by exhorting his schoolmates to speak Korean in defiance of laws mandating exclusive use of the Japanese language.

In 1925 Kim’s family fled Japanese oppression, settling in the Manchurian region of China. His formal education ended at the eighth grade level when he was expelled from school and jailed for “illegal political activities” against the Japanese, who were attempting to expand their rule into Manchuria during this time. It is believed that both of his parents died around the time he was jailed. Shortly after his release, Kim joined the underground Chinese Communist Youth League. He then began leading Chinese and Korean expatriate guerilla forces against Japanese military outposts in China.

Kim and his fellow guerrillas fled Manchuria in the face of increased Japanese occupation in 1940. He and his comrades retreated to a province in Siberia, where they may have received Soviet instruction in military tactics

and Communist doctrine. Kim reportedly married a fellow Korean partisan during that time. But her name remains unknown, and scholars are uncertain whether the union ended with divorce or her death. It is known that his second wife, Kim Chong Suk, joined his band of rebels as a young woman. In 1942 she gave birth to his son and eventual successor, Kim Jong Il. She died in the late 1940s while giving birth to a stillborn child.

Leader of North Korea

In August 1945 Japan surrendered the territories they had occupied during World War II, including Korea. Kim Il Sung returned to North Korea, now occupied by the Soviet Union. By this time Kim had risen to the rank of major in the Soviet Red Army, and he was an important resource for the Soviet government on military and political issues in the region.

Shortly after his return, Kim was hand-picked by the Soviets to establish a provisional government in the north. Several months later, he founded the North Korean Provisional People's Committee. By the end of 1946 he had also organized the North Korean Workers Party, the sole political party in the north, and the Korean People's Army (KPA), which shortly became the North Korean People's Army (NKPA). In February 1947 the Soviet-sponsored provisional government was formally replaced by the North Korean People's Assembly, led by Kim.

When the United Nations sponsored elections in May 1948, the North Korean administrative government refused to participate. The North Koreans instead established their own sovereign state called the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, which claimed authority over the entire Korean peninsula. The Republic's general assembly elected Kim Il Sung premier in September 1948, beginning Kim's 46-year reign.

Obsessed with Reunification

Kim advocated reunification of the Korean peninsula by any means necessary. Many scholars believe that Kim's primary motivation for reunification was not ideological, but nationalistic. Dae-Sook Suh, author of *Kim Il Sung: The North Korean Leader* writes:

The war has always been analyzed from the cold war viewpoint: the confrontation of superpowers, a complex accusation

of collusion among North Korea, the Soviet Union, and China, and the concept of aggression by persuasion... The objective of the war for Kim was quite different. It was neither the development of the concept of limited war, nor was it the expansion or containment of communism in Asia. The war for Kim was primarily the function of his own political ambition, and his effort to resolve the question of Korea's division.

For the first few years of his leadership, Kim's regime sponsored guerrilla forces in South Korea and subversive political action. When these activities failed to dislodge the UN-sponsored South Korean government of Syngman Rhee, the Soviets gave their blessing to an all-out military offensive. Kim's North Korean People's Army invaded South Korea in June 1950.

To Kim Il Sung, the Korean War was the "fatherland liberation war," and he believed—erroneously, as it turned out—that the offensive would trigger a popular uprising across the south against Syngman Rhee's government in Seoul. When this uprising failed to materialize, Kim was genuinely surprised. Most historians characterize the Korean War as being instigated by the Soviet Union, and the involvement of the Chinese after the UN moved north of the 38th parallel seems to suggest a greater Communist bloc agenda

Kim's original intent was to push south, capture Seoul, and reunify Korea militarily. He misjudged the American-led United Nations response, however. After enjoying early success, the NKPA suffered a series of crushing defeats, most notably at Inchon. When the U.S.-led UN forces crossed the 38th parallel and occupied Pyongyang in October 1950, Kim panicked and asked for immediate help from his Communist allies. From that point forward in the war, Kim was pushed aside, and the war was effectively managed by the Chinese military under commander Peng Dehuai. In fact, the Chinese remained in Korea long after the armistice was signed in July 1953, its troops finally leaving in 1958.

Pursues Policies of Isolationism and Militarism

After the armistice, Kim concentrated on building a strong industrial economy. He also developed his own style of Communism called *Chu'Che*, an odd blend of Marxist-Lenin Communism, isolationism, and his own personality cult. During this period, execution, imprisonment, or exile of opponents

became commonplace, and they remained a hallmark of Kim's government for the remainder of his rule.

Kim's economic policies emphasized heavy industry and collective farming, and until the 1970s, North Korea's economy was more robust than that of South Korea. Kim's insistence on isolationism, however, eventually served to alienate him somewhat from the Soviet Union and China, despite their similar political ideologies. In addition, the government's single-minded pursuit of self-sufficiency and military might bred economic stagnation and environmental carnage throughout the country.

Kim's desire for unification and his hostility toward the United States remained central in his political machinations. North Korea was responsible for a number of assassinations of South Korean leaders, an attempt on the life of South Korean president Park Chun Hee in 1968, and the capture of the USS *Pueblo*, a U.S. intelligence-gathering vessel and its crew, in the same year; North Korea held the 82 crew members of the *Pueblo* for 11 months before releasing them. Throughout Kim's regime, relations with the United States ranged from strained to profoundly hostile. North Korea's development of nuclear energy and nuclear weaponry have been a sticking point in international relations with the West for decades.

In August 1984 Kim announced that his son would eventually succeed him as North Korea's leader. This announcement underscored the fact that Kim, though supposedly aligned with Communist ideals of a society for the people, had effectively constructed a monarchy. His absolute control over every aspect of North Korean society enabled him to revise history, crush his opponents, and ensure that power would remain in his own family after his death.

Over the years, Kim diverted significant sums of his country's treasury to monuments to himself and his reign. In 1972, a huge bronze statue of Kim was dedicated for his 60th birthday. To commemorate another of his birthdays, he erected an Arch of Triumph taller than the original Arc du Triomphe in Paris.

By the latter years of his rule, Kim was revered as almost a demi-god in his own country, having convinced the people through his self-deification campaigns that he was the "Supreme Ruler." According to one biographer, Kim attempted to defy death itself by employing more than 2,000 doctors, biologists, and pathologists for the sole purpose of extending the lives of himself and his son for as long as possible. In the end, Kim Il Sung died a very conventional death of a heart attack on July 7, 1994.

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Supply Difficulties during the Korean War

During the Korean War, keeping supply lines open was a difficult task. In addition to arms and ammunition, troops needed appealing food, clean clothing, and showers, all of which were important to soldiers' morale. The following includes excerpts from three reports published in John G. Westover's Combat Support in Korea. All three pieces were written either by or for the quartermasters, the officers in charge of quarters (lodgings), food, and clothing. Together, these excerpts give some very different views of the challenges of life on the front lines.

In the following excerpt, taken from an oral report dated April 25, 1951, Major Lawrence Dobson shares his observations about combat meals, also known as combat rations or C rations.

The troops in Korea are fed two hot meals a day whenever it is tactically possible. It is desirable, of course, to have three hot meals, but we say a minimum of two: normally, breakfast and supper. Noon meals are an operational ration. Hot meals were started by necessity because of a shortage of operational rations. Today we have plenty of rations, but the troops and the leaders appreciate the benefit of kitchen-prepared meals. It is a terrific morale builder among the forward elements....

The C ration is the most acceptable ration we have to use in Korea. Everyone likes it. The relative acceptance ratings of the meat items are: (1) beans and frankfurters; (2) beans and pork; (3) meat and beans; (4) ham and lima beans; (5) spaghetti and meat; (6) hamburgers with gravy; (7) pork sausage patties with gravy; (8) meat and noodles; (9) chicken and vegetables; (10) beef stew; and (11) corned-beef hash.

This ration is a combat ration, and one of its characteristics is its capability of being consumed hot or cold. The reaction of the men was that the only items acceptable cold were the three bean items. The principal complaints were against the meat-and-spaghetti and the meat-and-noodle combinations. Both items were too dry, and when heated they would burn. The hamburgers and the sausage patties had too much fat and too much gravy. It is difficult to determine the acceptance of the chicken and vegetables. In the C-4 and the C-6 we had a chick-and-vegetables combination. The men disliked it. We had previously received reports on this, and in the C-7 we have a product of the same name but from a different formula. The men interviewed who have eaten the C-7 reported that the acceptance on the chicken-and-vegetables was very high. It is a very good product....

It had been reported previously that there was too much meat in the C ration. I found that for those men in the rear areas—those who used the ration only when they were making a movement—there may be too much meat. But we must remember that this ration was designed for the fighting man. He is a very young man—old men cannot climb hills. Fighters work hard [and] they will eat practically all you can carry up to them.

When talking to them, I asked, “Is there too much meat?”

“No.”

“Is there too much in the ration?”

“No; we will eat it all.”

Even the cocoa disc and the coffee. If they cannot prepare them at the time they are eating the ration, they will save them for later. An interesting comment was that they liked the cocoa but sometimes do not have the fire to heat the water. So the cocoa is being eaten as a chocolate bar. They wondered if we could not improve the eating quality of the cocoa disc and still save its quality for reconstituting it into cocoa....

When I asked, “What do you think of the individual combat ration?” the first thing said was, “Where is the spoon in the C-6?” And the next thing: “The C-7 is a lot better ration; it has a spoon.”

As I mentioned before, the men carry nothing. Mess kits are kept in kitchen trucks. Soldiers are stripped down—no packs—just the clothes they wear. We also used to think a man would never lose his eating utensils. That is not so. They lose them, and unit commanders cannot have them resupplied as fast as they are needed. In many cases knives, forks, and spoons are kept in the kitchen. At first the C ration came without spoons, and we got reports of men eating beans with their fingers. One Marine colonel cut his finger trying to make a spoon from the top of a can. I would say—and I am stating the opinion of everyone I interviewed—that plastic spoons are a *must* in the operational rations.

In the past we included a can opener in each accessory pack. Every soldier I saw had a can opener in his pocket or on his dogtag chain. He was afraid he would not have a can opener when he wanted to eat. If he had a can opener and got hold of another, he saved it. My prize example is a colonel who had one can opener on his dogtag chain and nine in his pack. So my recommendation is that the can openers be reduced to either two or three per

case and that they no longer be packed in the accessory pack, but be placed on top.

I am sure you have been told before of the method of feeding forward elements in Korea. The meals are cooked in the battalion areas, then carried forward in jeeps as far as possible, and finally packed by the Korean bearers using carrier straps or A-frames. Now, there are problems involved. Bearers cannot carry water up to the top of the hill except for drinking, and they cannot carry a stove to heat mess-kit water [for washing up], so no one on the hill keeps his mess kit. The kits are all kept back in the kitchen and are carried forward with the food. This is a problem, since the meat ones do not nest very well. Fifty mess kits to take care of an average platoon will fill a foot locker, so the mess kits are carried forward in foot lockers, boxes, or duffel bags. They are washed first in the kitchen, but they become dusty on the trip forward.

* * *

In this undated excerpt, Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth G. Schelberg discusses clothing exchanges.

We learned that the quartermaster's shower and clothing exchange was a great economy in spite of the additional equipment necessary to allow the men to bathe and to launder their clothing.

The 7th Infantry Division began its clothing exchange in February 1951. Before that each man wore and carried two sets of clothing, and reserve supplies in the division held at least one complete uniform per man. When the clothing exchange began, we collected all the duffel bags and limited each soldier to the clothing on his back plus a change of underclothing and socks. Clothing at the shower points and laundry equaled one half uniform per soldier. Thus the total number of uniforms per man dropped from three sets to one and a half....

There were many advantages to the clothing exchange system. It cut down the weight the soldier had to carry; it also eliminated duffel bags and the 30-man detail in each regiment to guard and handle them. This increased our mobility. The cleaner clothing improved the hygiene of the troops, and the automatic exchange of clothing eliminated all requisitions below division. Exchange made possible early repair before shirts and trousers became unsalvageable, and it eliminated the old practice of mutilating Government property in order to get the supply sergeant to issue a new item. Reduced stocks also lessened the possibility of the enemy's capturing valuable supplies.

We learned that in combat there is no need to publish a shower schedule because company commanders preferred to send men to get showers whenever the tactical situation permitted. From experience we learned that the shower units could not be moved farther forward than regiment....

The shower and clothing exchange was a great morale builder for the men. After an attack in which a regiment was unable to release men to get showers, we would augment its bathing facilities and see that every man could bathe and change within four days. Normally, however, the men had a shower once a week.

Company commanders watched their men for signs of excessive fatigue and sent them to the showers when a relief seemed necessary. Often a shower and a hot meal at regiment was enough to restore a soldier's efficiency. If the fatigue were dangerous, the soldier could be sent to the regimental rest camp for a day or two of sleep, hot meals, and regular baths. This was an excellent way to prevent combat fatigue.

* * *

In this excerpt from a statement written November 15, 1950, Major James W. Spellman discusses the ways in which support services failed the troops.

From the first day they spent in Korea, members of the 24th Division's quartermaster section have had mixed feelings about quartermaster support. We remember with pride the difficult things being done immediately, and the impossible taking a little longer. Then we shudder as we recall how often we failed in those hectic days of defeat, victory, and stalemate. We don't like to remember how many times we have had to turn down requests. "How about the mantle for my Coleman lantern?" "How about a generator for my field range?" "How about ..." stencil paper, GI soap, trousers, tent poles, paper clips, underwear, cigarettes?

We seldom had to make excuses for lack of rations or gasoline. But yeast, baking powder, shoestrings, toilet paper, and forks were not available. It has been weeks since many of the small but very important items have been received. Shoes are tied with scraps of cord and kitchens are using toilet soap received from home by mail. I do not doubt that hundreds of soldiers are writing home for items of quartermaster issue because they are not available, or because they come more quickly by mail....

From the tragic days in Taejon we have sensed a passive indifference to our requirements for individual and unit equipment. In the heat of summer we begged for even salvaged fatigue jackets and trousers to be shipped from Japan to cover our semi-naked soldiers, for salt tablets, and for mess kits to replace those lost by our troops as they withdrew over the mountains, carrying only their rifles.

It was understandable that supply confusion should exist at first. But I do not understand why the supply authorities should resist our legitimate requests with criticisms that we were using too much. How *were* we using too much? What known yardstick of modern U.S. logistics could be applied to this long series of defeats and withdrawals?

From the first telephone request—ignored—for minimum clothing and equipment, through the present requirement of six copies of every requisition, we have felt the antagonistic unsympathetic reaction on the part of Eighth Army's minor quartermaster personnel. They have minutely questioned every item of even emergency requirements, and deliberately delayed supplies while they checked and rechecked requests against noncombat-type statistical reports. There has been an almost comical questioning of requirements, delving into the microscopic details of why a company, outnumbered 30 to 1, did not evacuate kitchen equipment under small arms fire....

So long as Pusan remained within truck distance, it was possible to bypass approving authorities and go directly to the mountains of supplies in the port. Often we obtained supplies in Pusan that were impossible to get through the red-tape maze of proper channels. Personnel in charge of warehouse operations frequently begged us to take supplies so they could make room for those being unloaded from ships....

Even now, if a unit is willing to send its trucks 230 miles to Ascom City, or 400 miles to Pusan, supplies can be obtained. But the price in broken springs and deadlined trucks is prohibitive.

As the drive passed Kaesong, Pyongyang, and points north, frantically worded requests to Pusan awaited the opening of a shaky rail system for delivery. On 10 November, the 24th Division had just completed a 40-mile withdrawal of its forward elements. The quartermaster section, then at Sukchon, received a placid notification of a boxcar of class II and class IV supplies—complete with car, engine and train numbers, and hour of departure

from Pusan on 9 November—destined for “24th Division, Waegwan.” Our rear echelons had cleared Waegwan nearly two months earlier.

A long time would be required to list the major deficiencies in our supply line. In the prosecution of a war the lack of a generator for a field range is not vital. But the result of poor meals is lowered morale—which is vital. When repeated supply failures occur, when indifference is shown, troops often become discouraged and indifferent. Supply failures at this level cost men their lives.

Source: Westover, John G. *Combat Support in Korea*. U.S. Army in Action Series. Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army, U.S. Government Printing Office, n.d.

IMPORTANT PEOPLE, PLACES, AND TERMS

Note on personal names and alphabetization: Traditionally, Korean, Chinese, and other Asian names are listed with the family name first and the given name last, as in Kim Il Sung. In an alphabetical list, the elements of these Korean names are not reversed and they are alphabetized under the family name—the first element (Kim). Some Koreans choose to use a Westernized form of their name, placing the family name as the last element, as in Syngman Rhee. These names, in an alphabetical list, are treated like Western names—the elements of the names are reversed and separated by a comma (Rhee, Syngman). For Chinese names, the pinyin spelling system has been used (Mao Zedong), except when a different form would be more easily recognized (Chiang Kai-shek).

Acheson, Dean

Secretary of State under President Truman

Allied powers

During World War II, a group of countries (including France, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, the United States, Canada, Australia, most of Europe, and other nations) that fought against the Axis powers

Almond, Edward (Ned)

Commander of X Corps in Korea (August 1950-July 1951)

Armistice agreement

Agreement between UN and Communist forces that concluded the Korean War, signed July 27, 1953

Axis powers

During World War II, a group of countries (primarily Germany, Italy, and Japan) that fought against the Allied powers

CCF

Chinese Communist Forces—armed forces from the People's Republic of China

CHRONOLOGY

1910

Japan annexes Korea, and Korean citizens become subjects of Japan's emperor. *See p. 11.*

1941

Korean nationals forced to serve in Japan's military in World War II. *See p. 12.*

1945

August 6, 1945—The United States drops an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan; three days later, the U.S. drops a second bomb on Nagasaki. *See p. 17.*

August 8, 1945—The Soviet Union declares war on Japan, marches into Japanese-controlled Manchuria (China) and Korea. *See p. 17.*

August 15, 1945—Japan surrenders unconditionally to the United States, releasing its claim on the Korean peninsula. The Soviet Union is to accept the surrender north of the 38th parallel, and the United States will accept the surrender to the south. *See p. 17.*

August-September 1945—U.S. and Soviet troops occupy Korea. *See p. 17.*

September 2, 1945—Japan signs the formal surrender document and relinquishes control over all colonial holdings, including Korea. *See p. 17.*

1946-47

The United States and the Soviet Union hold talks but fail to agree on particulars of a joint trusteeship that will result in the unification of the Korean peninsula. *See p. 20.*

1948

May 10, 1948—A national election is held in Korea under United Nations supervision, but North Korea refuses to participate. Syngman Rhee is elected president of the Republic of Korea (South Korea). *See p. 21.*

September 9, 1948—With Soviet sponsorship, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) is established, with Kim Il Sung as its premier. *See p. 21.*

November-December 1948—Both the United States and the Soviet Union withdraw troops from the Korean peninsula, leaving only advisory forces in place. *See p. 21.*

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